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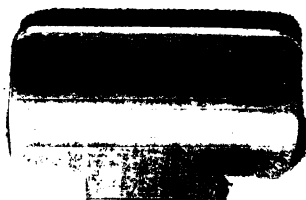


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DEERLEAP DUSK

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Leslie A. E. Swinney. 1901.





DEERLEAP DUSK,

A

DREAM OF SORROW.

BY

JOHN WATKINS PITCHFORD.

LONDON :

110, ST. GEORGE'S ROAD, SOUTHWARK.

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DEERLEAP DUSK,

A

DREAM OF SORROW.

I

N YMPHS of the crimson dusk,
Who, ere the glow of lingering twilight leave
The realms of golden eve,
Diffuse your dews of pearl and airs of musk,
Ye, to man's tearful gaze,
Standing aloof, nothing for sorrow reck ;
Nor will your shuttle check,
That weaves remorselessly in rapid flight,
The sable shroud of night,
Beyond eve's portals vast of reddening haze.

Musing thus, methought a spell
Adown the darkening woodside fell ;
Light dance of gnats, from sport released,
With boom of passing beetle ceased.

Sheep bells chiming from the hill
Jangled faintly, then grew still ;
• Under the fronds of arching fern
Ceased the glow worm's lamp to burn ;
Beneath the eaves and frowning brow
Of wide out-branching oaken bough,
From day's jewelled fringe afar,
Sparkling died the evening star ;
Earth's mighty fabric seemed to swim ;
Hushed, the glimmering world grew dim,
Rose flushed sky, and dusk hillside,
Now failing, faded, quivering died.

Then, it seemed my sorrowing thought
Brief glimpse of nature's workings caught,
As pageant after pageant vast,
All draped in transient beauty passed,
Bewildering, strange, majestic, splendid,
Yet oft with scenes familiar blended.

Dark as midnight of the tomb,
Rayless Acherontian gloom,
Outspread a cavern's broad extent,
Trending like some continent ;
A world of darkness, dense, prolonged,
Darkness with existence thronged ;
Where myriad myriad beings range,
Through countless forms in endless change.

The sepulchre and womb of earth,
E'er quickening with mysterious birth,

Lives unnumbered here prepare
Death's dread havoc to repair :
Vital currents noiseless flow,
Murmuring voices come and go,
With movement startling, mutterings deep.
Like dreams that range through fevered sleep ;
Vague rustlings, dim suggested fancies,
Frantic flights, delirious dances,
Buzzing of startled bats in caves,
Or earth-falls down steep-sided graves :
Nameless alarm around was thrown,
And horror of the dread unknown,
To hear from Stygian depths below,
Life's river sound in awful flow.

Through earthen roof and rocky vein,
Tricklets dripped from sun-smit rain,
That welling round the clasper root,
Life blood gave the quickening shoot.
Here thirsting mouths in darkness drank
The river of God which downward sank :
While underneath where sunbeams fell,
Breathed with tender trembling swell,
Like fairy strains, all softly flowing,
Æolian music, gently blowing.

Deep in these domains of night,
Beyond the bourn of mortal sight,
A frenzied laughter wildly rang,
A mirth, which not from reason sprang ;
Where lives grotesque, mis-shapen, hide,

The potter's hand had cast aside ;
Restless beings, merry elves,
Who, laughing, mocked their bitter selves :
And, nature's nice discrimination
Decreeing for them re-creation,
Here tarried life's transitions brief,
Until new birth should bring relief.

Now through the vast pavilioned gloom,
Where dwelt life's Arbiter of doom,
Rose ten thousand pale blue spires,
Wild fringe of dancing hair-like fires,
That leaped aloft, by fate updriven,
Upward to climb towards unseen heaven.
Countless flames dart forth aglow ;
Countless forges labouring blow :
Where atom to its atom rushed,
And difference was with difference crushed.

Lo ! falls a drop, another falls,
Then merge their glittering bubble walls ;
Bright flames leap forth to interfuse
With conscious fires of strangest hues ;
And arms reach out from vital flames,
That build up sentient throbbing frames :
Till, cell by cell, a fabric rises,
Compacted well of strange surprises :
Now the fires drop, and in their room,
All dimly outlined in the gloom,
With fire in eye and fire in mouth,
The separate life crawls forth uncouth.

Through clouds confused, oppressive, dread,
Region of darkness wide outspread,
Bursts through the silence now great sound,
Like when a tempest gathering round,
Flings thundering billows on the shore,
Sonorous blows its forest roar :
Wrestlings fierce of giant force,
Leashed in adamantine course,
Power that quivering throbs in gloom,
With whirrings dread of nature's loom,
Earth's trembling loom, which day and night
Throws fair patterned things to light ;
Life through death like shuttle hurled,
The laboured breathing of a world.

II

PORTA LUCIS.

STARTLED, wonder-struck, amazed,
While in the obscure profound I gazed,
Rustlings weird, and whisperings nigh,
Methinks are heard to move close by,
With hiss and surge like seeding grasses,
That toss whene'er the zephyr passes ;
Winnowings of unnumbered wings,
Light footfalls, restless flutterings :
Glad exodus of spirits now free
To seek life's ampler liberty,
Who throng the steep and skyward way,
Struggling to climb to light of day.

Before my vestibule of thought,
Like before some window brought,
Successive wonders gliding range,
Prolong, dissolve, through wondrous change ;
As marshalled 'neath a varying sky,
Swept the summer's pageant by ;
Flowing along in silent stream,
A solemn, grand, mysterious, dream.

Lo ! across night's dewy lawn
Appears the angel of the dawn,
With face of splendour, vestments white,
Who brought God's benison of light,
Heaven's blessing first when time began,
Beginning still the day's brief span :
Now from tent of mist upfurled
Softly comes the glistening world.
Dull earth awakes ; to wondering gaze
Springtime dawns with brightening days ;
A tenderer air its magic threw,
'Neath covering clouds with breaks of blue ;
Mild penitence of earth and sky,
Rough winter's wildness now past by.

Scarce has the dawn from cloudy birth,
Spread forth its hands to bless the earth,
When from the corn the lark upsprings,
Circling aloft on quivering wings,
Chirrup his brief and rippling mirth,
Then stone-like drops again to earth ;
Once more to rise, to ply anew,

In heaven's clerestory freshly blue,
His rapt delirious ecstasy,
Angelic song to fantasy ;
Earth voicing in his glorious lay,
Her welcome to the light of day.

Loud with love the wild birds sing,
With love the echoes loudly ring,
From boles of sprouting elms that stand
Rough pillars round the hedgerowed land ;
From cloisters dim of pinewood gloom,
White paradise of garden bloom,
Wild birds trill in happy throngs,
Their dear companionable songs ;
The lyre of Orpheus sure is heard,
For woodland, orchard, hedge, are stirred ;
Fair earth below, blue sky above,
Ring with sweet melodies of love.

The blackthorn, sheeted like a sprite,
Rises 'mid the woods in white,
And in fancy's frolic seems
Eurydice of ancient dreams,
Who fades at gaze, yet whispers low,
How nature calls from realms below,
To hush the winter's angry strife,
And flush the woodlands dark with life,
Till spreads each spray, and climbs each spire,
Buds every branch, clouds every brier :
Life re-blossoms in its tomb ;
Festal hosts unnumbered bloom :

And the sweet spring rains adrip,
Kissing each floweret's velvet lip,
And the sun's glad smile on high,
Give Heaven's bright welcome from the sky.

In the tender pale green light
Of the ash-grove's leafy height,
The blackbird, from his orange bill,
Flutes golden undertones at will.
Wine of sunshine, rapturous, glad,
Makes the morning larks like mad.

Music fills the damson bloom,
Where finches building in green gloom,
With simple craft that scarce deceives,
Nest in newly opened leaves.
Fair islanded, 'midst blossom foam,
The red-chapped goldfinch makes her home ;
And, happy, where the sunshine falls,
The chaffinch from the plum tree calls,
Springs from the bough that swings and shakes
Loose on the air white petal flakes.
Cherry blossom snows around,
Fluttering pear bloom strews the ground.

Hark ! the robin's flourish, then
The delicate warbling of the wren ;
Ribald sparrows jumping chatter,
Of some ragged nesting matter ;
Loud calls the cuckoo, while she flies,
Each spring-time bringing pleased surprise ;

In chantry shrined of golden gloom,
Sings the linnet from the broom,
Whilst, incense-like, the rising dew
Heavenward climbs through morning's blue.

Down orchard vistas, mossy, low,
'Neath apple blossom's fragrant snow,
Minstrelsy of clear-voiced thrush
Leads the chorus, points the hush.
Swallows, white-breasted, speck the blue,
Twittering swifts wild flights pursue,
Aloft with joy careering high,
To hold bright festival in the sky ;
Blithely rejoice : nor know how fast
Spring's delights are gliding past.

Life revels in the ampler scope,
Brought to the world by larger hope ;
And, radiant as with sweet surprise,
Fair earth to heaven's first smile replies ;
Sings and smiles, loud anthems yields,
Till woods respond to crowslipped fields ;
And myriad songsters with accord,
Unite to praise creation's Lord ;
Responsive ply their noblest parts,
Crying to men, " Lift up your hearts ! "

Steering his bright-pointed plough,
Now climbs the hind the hillside brow :
Retinued by rook and daw,
Rascal crow with raucous caw ;

And, should rain, gem-fringed, o'erwhelm,
Drawing his team below the elm,
Waits, while the storm its anger flings,
And pelts the pool to bubbling rings.
Furrow or sward the shower receives,
Dropped soft on clods or winking leaves,
Where liquid pearls on blade and leaf,
Glide like tears in bitter grief.
Then sunshine breaks through cloud once more,
Smiling to tell all trouble o'er.
Delightful smell of growing grass,
Floats on the loitering winds that pass,
Whilst a sunny freshness fair,
Breath of the meadows, fills the air.

Hail ! white-handed spring ! whose showers,
The earth array with mist of flowers ;
That filch from heaven its rainbow hues,
And heaven's own fragrance far diffuse :
Evangel flowers that mute record
The kindness of Nature's Lord.

How freshly sweet the dainty frills
Of April's dewy daffodils,
That grouped in gracious companies,
Flutter beneath yon budding trees !
Green-sleeved primroses ablow,
Coyly through the woodland shew.
There violets blow whose virgin breath
Might ravish the cold heart of death.
Hyacinths' blue scented bells

Pave the purple gloom of dells,
While clouds of wood anemones,
Flurry and crush on every breeze.

Fields adust with daisy snow,
Golden meads where cowslips blow,
That, tawny, tear-brimmed, freckled, bright,
Are still be-dropped with gems of night,
Pale lilac-tinted cuckoo flowers,
Daughters of the jewelled showers,
And blossoming lilacs with fresh smell,
Of lengthening days and sunshine tell.
Acres buttercups outrolled,
Crust the glebe with cloth of gold ;
Where towards the sun grow daily nigher
Multitudinous blade and spire.

Swiftly now the picture changes,
And forth the willing fancy ranges,
Where every bush and every spray
Thatched with flakes of blossoming may,
Throw out their fragrant scent to find,
And snare each lingering love-sick wind.
Beauty clothes with graceful charm
Field and swallow-haunted farm ;
Rutted road with shadows barred ;
Lichened roof, straw-littered yard ;
Doves twinkling round the dove-cotes fly,
Now dark now light against the sky ;
On velvet grass where sunshine sifts
Through apple-blossom's pink-white drifts,

Or 'neath the hawthorns, gambolling stray,
Milk-white calves, red-nosed, at play.

Buried in daisies by their dams,
Merrily frisk the bleating lambs.
Hard by, though jerking magpies chatter,
And starlings gravely nodding clatter,
Still sweetly warbled may we hear
Gay twittering of the goldfinch near.
The morn with music freshly quakes,
From ceaseless chirpings in the brakes :
Finches undulating fly
Over the fields with querulous cry ;
Larks make love in lush green corn ;
White marriage gear bedecks the thorn :
Each blossoming bush that scents the gale
Modestly dropping its bridal veil.

How rich the waft that fragrant steams,
From where i' the sun the village dreams,
With dormer windows, hooded eaves,
Half buried in the twinkling leaves :
From cottage fronts where jasmine strays,
Roses peep, and woodbine sways :
Prim gardens, where, in gaudy show,
Sweet Williams, pansies, wall-flowers grow.
Rich tulips, ruby-chaliced, shine,
Translucent, brimmed with sunlight wine,
Until each floweret, tilted up,
Would seem a sacramental cup.
There mignonette, white pinks profuse,

Bergamot and flower-de-luce,
Lavender and rosemary,
With southernwood hold company ;
Straggling sweet peas wing their flight,
Fairy-petalled, violet, white :
The scarlet lightning's vivid hue
Shines brave 'mid columbine and rue :
Where later grow tall hollyhocks,
Marigolds, white clustering stocks,
Carnations, lily, red-heart rose,
Link hands with all that fairest blows,
Enchanting sisterhood of flowers,
To gaily dance through summer hours :
Loveliest of pictures ! though arrayed
With loveliness that soon must fade.

The blossoming lime-tree's fragrance warm
Allures the bees that murmuring swarm ;
Sweet-brier rose and elder bloom,
Richly every hedge perfume.
Bright laburnum's golden waves,
Flow cascade like o'er dark green caves ;
Deep meadows flash their billowing sheen,
Though shepherd's clocks may still be seen,
And ere the winds of June at play,
Have puffed the daisy dust away.
Milch kine 'mid buttercups ablow,
Wade dewlap deep through golden glow.
Sweet scented gorse, broad yellow seas,
All drowsy with the hum of bees ;
With flowering bean-fields, black and white,
Oppress the sense with cloyed delight.

Sunshine all the foreground fills,
Long sunbeams rake the distant hills ;
Gently blows the summer breeze,
Lightly sway the flowing trees :
The lonely loveliness and rest
Delight, then tranquilize the breast.
Life's fretful cares far off reviewed,
Now bask in sunny quietude ;
Find sweet reprieve to burdened mind,
Breathe the sweet-brier's balmy wind,
Enjoy the sun, the pictured view,
The simple air, large sky of blue :
Accept what sunshine, fragrance, give,
When 'tis luxury to live.
O fair white world in glorious show !
Green billows tipped with blossom snow ;
Dome of blue, and breath of bliss,
How bright, how sweet a world is this !

III

ELYSIUM.

NOW methought all things that be
Have soared to earth's felicity ;
Where in brief noon of bliss they poise,
And revel in life's transient joys ;
Long summer days with dark blue sky,
Have brought the bee and butterfly :
Aloft the swallow dives and sweeps ;

From out the nest the fledgeling peeps ;
 Earth's mantle green, her hedgerow bowers,
 Are decked and fringed with summer flowers ;
 Rich meads, all sorrel streaked, unfold,
 Tawny meadows creaming gold :
 Amid the corn the poppies blaze,
 Out from the hedge the woodbine sways ;
 Frail wild roses thorn-entwined,
 Faintly scent the summer wind ;
 Tree and field like suppliants wait,
 Silent before heaven's golden gate.

Glorious the landscape, broad, serene,
 Bathed in flood of noonday sheen,
 Pulses with ever changing light,
 Tender, softened, living, bright :
 Margined aloft with pomp and show,
 Of mountain clouds, edged silver snow ;
 Sunbeams ray the prospect blue,
 And glory give the distant view :
 While glittering pool and purple moor,
 Hop-garden, orchard, meadow-floor,
 Bright in sunshine, dark in shade,
 Seem all in fair mosaic laid.

Coolness through the air distils,
 Cloud shadows race along the hills,
 Or wandering spots of duskness throw,
 That play like birds on fields below ;
 Seas of green whose verdure bright,
 Is pied with daisy islands white.

How pleasant then, 'neath open day,
Down paths through meads unmown to stray ;
Where hovering sparrows drop in the grass,
And corncrakes thread the billowing mass,
While clover, shepherd's clocks, and daisies,
Tangling surge in smothering mazes.

Flush-faced mowers, jocund, blithe,
Swish through knee-deep grass the scythe ;
Wipe with a wisp its white-edged blade,
Seek noonday rest in trellised shade :
Lie in green twilight near the pool,
Or quench large thirst with cider cool :
Coarse-joked laughter's loud surprise,
With shouts resound, and boisterous cries.

Grey blue wood-pigeons about,
From copse to clump steer in and out.
The cuckoo's hoarser call is heard,
Sounding more like man than bird ;
Till red-tipped leaves of tardy oak
Speak as if a stranger spoke.

Melodious, rounded, sweetly strong,
Comes the blackbird's golden song ;
That, to the hearer, thoughtful grown,
Seems like sung for him alone.
The unvarying yellowhammer's tune
Prolongs the shimmering hour of noon.
O'erhead, where steadfast blue abides,
The swift, like a black crescent, glides ;

And fluttering swallows dive and sweep,
O'er fields where sunshine falls asleep.

Fragrant scent from new-mown grass
Loads the winds that wandering pass ;
And lures the loiterer to the shade
By freshly mounded haycock made ;
Where slumbrous warmth of murmuring noon,
Low stifled drone of insects' tune,
Redly weigh the eyelids down,
Till quivering dreams the senses drown.

Foxgloves rise where silence reigns,
In dusk of solitary lanes ;
Or woods, yet dark, though noonday shines,
Where sound, like surf, the whispering pines ;
And sunny glades all seem t' unfold
Pathways to a world of gold.
Cattle in playful shadows lie,
Clattering jays harsh screaming fly ;
Strong clap from wood-pigeon's quick wings
Sharp challenge to the echo flings :
With shiver of shadows where it goes,
The weary wind half-fainting blows.

Tell us, ye breezes, ere ye hie,
Whence have ye sped, and whither fly !
'Neath far off skies, your anger stirred,
Impelled by stern commanding word,
Terror may reign, in darkness nursed,
Dread thunders rave, tornadoes burst.

Sheets of javelin slanted rain,
Lash to rage the foaming main ;
Lightning rend the coal black clouds,
Despair shriek wild through salt white shrouds.
A waste of tumbling billows high
Clambering mounts the stormy sky :
Opening ten thousand graves, and then
Stifling the cries of drowning men.
Slant wailing gulls the turmoil breast,
Skimming the spray-fringed breaker's crest.
A fury nothing can assuage
Round tusks of rock churns deadly rage.
Foam-flakes hissing spin and drift,
Then scud o'er billows wind-cut swift ;
Where monstrous waves, huge mountains, roam,
Thundering to plunge in smothered foam.

Soon the gale careering high,
Breaks the rainbow in the sky ;
Then, like man, when passion 's past,
And reason mildly reigns at last,
Drops the fitful baffled breeze,
Through soft blue skies to soft blue seas :
Until the sparkling wave-top's plash
Flings o'er the deep its diamond flash ;
The swell moves dumbly towards the land,
Then sobbing dies upon the strand.

But, should midnight veil the deep,
While your disastrous course ye sweep,
The crescent moon uptilted flies,

Pinnacle like through drifting skies,
 Though clouds, with oft renewed assault,
 Would quench her splendour in heaven's vault :
 Countless waves lift up their might,
 Joining the chant of sapphire night ;
 Thundering sublimely on the strand,
 Sounds ocean's diapason grand.

Walking the waves again the morn,
 Flings abroad bright shafts in scorn :
 Then floats in jewelled robes of light,
 O'er golden harvests, meadows white.
 Fleecy mist updrifting smokes,
 From hoary pastures, grey-green oaks,
 Furze-clad heath or glittering river,
 Shivering grasses, reeds that quiver.
 Each wayside thorn proud coronal wears
 Of diamond dew, each grass tuft bears
 Jewels that flash from every blade,
 As if the world afresh were made ;
 Lustre lights each brier that rambles ;
 Heaven forsakes not thorns nor brambles.

Thus varying slowly change the days,
 From winter's mirk to summer's blaze ;
 Forth from midnight's blackest hue,
 Has dawned this day of heavenly blue :
 Though bitter tears the eyes may fill,
 Yet life is full of sweetness still :
 Its darkest clouds oft quickly range,
 To work some new more friendly change.

Firm-bound, close-hedged, denied advance,
Environed hard by fate or chance,
Masters of fate we still have power
Greatly to mould or mar the hour.
Before us lie yet larger fields
An ever widening knowledge yields ;
And, though mystery deep surrounds
Life's horizon's misty bounds,
No adverse fate the hope destroys,
That future days hold fuller joys.

In the green gloom of chesnut trees,
Lulled by tune of birds and bees,
Break through the trance of noonday dreams,
Babble and glance of running streams,
Whose rippling laughter, light caress,
Proclaim green earth's deep happiness ;
Soft gliding, tinkling, liquid chimes,
That gurgle smooth sweet water rhymes,
Murmuring still in old world tune
Low lullaby of slumbrous June,
When with light music of the leaves,
Billowed with green the broad earth heaves.

From silvery loops that wind about,
Alive with splash of leaping trout,
Pools wherein the swallow dips,
Soon the brook to silence slips,
Disappearing 'mid the trees,
With glances furtive as it flees :
The widening wavelet's gentle kiss

Lips the shore : in sunny bliss
 Water wagtails wade and stand,
 Where silvery minnows bask on sand ;
 And playing fishes lurk and start,
 Then, under the waving brook-weed, dart.

From boiling pools rise clouds of spray,
 Where spectral rainbows fitful play.
 Now leaps the stream the rocky ledge,
 Then hastes to hide in rush and sedge ;
 Round chattering curve, down tranquil reach,
 The current swerves 'neath wide-armed beech,
 Where Tityrus his fill of shade
 Might find, and, musing, see displayed,
 Through veil of leaves, on glassy ponds,
 Fringed by lissom willow wands,
 Languid lilies placid lie,
 Asleep beneath a placid sky.

Brooks that silver seam the land,
 Floored with golden gravelled sand,
 Now flurrying glitter in the sun ;
 Then darkly shadowed voiceless run.
 Where fetlock deep red cattle drink,
 In netted light mossed pebbles blink ;
 Bold the random blackbird dashes,
 The blue king-fisher sudden flashes ;
 And where black-barred birches, troop,
 Step the slope, and drinking droop,
 Idle, knee-deep in the stream,
 Splashing horses doze and dream.

Clover-purple meadows blow,
Where skimming swallows come and go.
Here cattle, revelling in the breeze,
Swing their tails below the trees.
'Neath plumes of foaming meadow-sweet,
Where bracken fronds with brambles meet,
Through sorrel, bennets, quivering round,
Slips the brook without a sound ;
The unseen current flickers through
Germander speedwell's patch of blue ;
Harebells flutter, sunshine gilds,
Where the sweet sedge-warbler builds.

Sounds the gentlest reach the ear
In the breathing silence near ;
The surge of elm trees, just awoke,
Low creeping whisper of the oak ;
Toss of ash plumes gently stirred,
Light as waft of wing of bird,
Soft as the dew in evening hours,
That wakes the fragrance of the flowers :
Whilst poised o'erhead the lark on high
Fills in the silence from the sky.

While slow such pictures fair unwind,
On beauty feeds the tranquil mind ;
That lapped in leaves and whispering quiet,
Submission yields to nature's fiat :
Escapes awhile from noise and troubles,
The fret and foam of life's brief bubbles,
Views the world, then lets it go,

Dream-like in its pictured show :
Seclusion finds, enjoyment deep,
Which, rapt, the ravished senses keep.
Heaven's own silence of the hills
With heavenly peace the spirit fills,
That, spell-bound rests, like cloud upfurled,
Quiet in its quiet world.

IV

TENEBRAE.

O RAPTURE calm of summer leisure !
Each sight, each sound a tranquil pleasure !
From hence, 'neath canopy outspread,
Of green-veined elm leaves overhead,
Behold below a world displayed
Of sun diversified with shade.
Broad earth with bright-edged greenness decked,
Bathed in light, with shadow flecked,
Blue delicate film through all the air,
Veiling the pastures, heavenly fair,
Softens the gleam and shimmering quiver,
Glint of pool, and flash of river ;
Or, where wind of morning strays
Down purple-ruffled water ways :
O'er all heaven's blue with cloudlets light,
Far off the sails of windmills white.
Wide as the horizon's bounds extend,
Lies this fair delightful land :

Ramparted by dim blue hills,
While peace untold the landscape fills.

Pleasant then are lonely lanes,
Sweet-smelling, cool, where quiet reigns :
Arched boughs, thick-pleached, o'erhead unite,
Excluding noon's most searching light.
Drop-tipped ferns and grassy tresses,
Water worts and emerald cresses,
In twilight flourish, velvet green,
Which ne'er the sun's bright rays have seen.

Pleasant the blowing air of hills,
Alive with secret hurrying rills ;
From down-lands curlew-haunted, high,
Domed by the blue and lonely sky :
From slopes where wandering sheep-bells tinkle,
Sun-parched slopes that quivering twinkle.
When bleat from neighbouring hill-top falls :
His barking dog the shepherd calls,
Shades with his hand his dazzled eyes,
Then on the thymy hill-slope lies.

Nodding harebells, tufted grass,
Waving in all the winds that pass,
Crown breezy heights, whence, far below,
Shining wheels the gliding crow.
There roams in wanton liberty,
The restless wandering humble bee ;
Booms, then sideway swinging by,
Seeks where honied treasures lie ;

In clumps of clover 'neath the feet,
Red-stemmed clover, juicy, sweet :
Where celandine with saintfoin grow,
Or fragrant breadths of wild thyme blow :
Humblest bloom supplies its needs,
For honey lurks in lowliest weeds.

Shadows drift past in noiseless crowds,
Governed o'erhead by gathering clouds,
Vast mountain masses piled for storm,
High battlemented bastions form,
O'er lurid gloom where thunder prowls,
And dungeoned deep in darkness growls.

Now fades the sun from down and hill ;
Breathless the air, more sultry still ;
Gloom slowly o'er the landscape grew,
And darkness o'er the spirit threw :
In whose weird silence, brooding, strange,
Lo ! now transpired a wondrous change.
Methought approached insensibly
Music's glorious majesty ;
Æolian strains that richly languish,
Pathetic, breathing strange sweet anguish,
Breathed loud, breathed low, now swelling, sighing,
Then far in loneliest silence, dying.

The life of all created things
Throbbled like a harp of myriad strings,
Which, smitten by some strenuous hand,
Responded to each stern demand,

When rose to heaven earth's mighty chorus,
Majestic, massive, grand, sonorous.

Stillness again : till, through my dream
Rang suddenly a frantic scream,
Wild piercing shriek of anguish lone,
With fright of death in every tone,
That helpless for assistance cried,
Then far in distance hopeless died :
Discord in nature's anthem strain,
Life's awful mystery of pain.

Now flashed in momentary gleam,
Across thought's quickly-lighted dream,
Earth's brimming tide of tears and blood,
Outvoluming Cocytus' flood.
All creatures mourn ; whate'er has breath
Suffering meets, and meets with death :
Till rises, not from man alone,
Creation's universal moan.

The hawk had splashed with tell-tale blood,
The honeysuckle of the wood ;
Reddening the bracken blood was seen,
While blood bedabbled all the green.
Ah ! my God ! this world's fair sight.
Had, changing, sunk to dismal night.

Aghast the troubled mind surveyed
Sorrow's world of mournful shade ;
Then wistful turned with bated breath

Perturbed to glance towards pitiful death ;
Where the yew's low branches wave,
And drop red berries on man's grave :
Yearned to know the life that springs
Underneath the form of things,
A strange real world, enduring, vast,
Thronged with treasures from the past,
If there, perchance, the key be found,
Of mysteries that man's life surround.

Helpless to solve the problem dread,
Or part the cloud o'er nature spread,
Reason yet clung with solemn awe
To love, as nature's crowning law ;
Believed that God would ne'er create
Aught which He Himself would hate :
Watched the deepest darkness drawn,
Around the threshold of the dawn ;
Saw though joy may quickly fade,
Grief too is but a passing shade :
Whilst from life's most dreaded woes
Oft man's greatest good arose :
Then craved from heaven its piteous alms,
The light that leads, the faith that calms.

Kindness everywhere is found,
Love suggests itself around ;
Radiant shines in all things fair,
Fragrant breathes through all the air ;
Love in rich exuberance yields,
Fills the folds, and clothes the fields ;

Defends the strengthless, feeds the young,
The weak befriends against the strong :
Unfledged swallows in their nest
Peep from beneath their mother's breast :
Children's kisses, winsome eyes,
Tell that human love ne'er dies.
Though dimly seen, with earnest grasp
Every golden hope we clasp :
Rejoicing happiness is found,
That earth is no forsaken ground ;
Happiness with life is given,
Dower of all creatures under heaven.

Smoothly gliding, swiftly gone,
The picture fades, the dream dreams on.
The blue smiles through the cloud once more :
Bright sunshine lights the landscape's floor.
Reviving, now afresh are heard
Buzz of insect, song of bird.
Happy finches lilting stray,
Merry starlings whistling play ;
Two white butterflies anew
Giddily sport against the blue ;
The wild rose pinks the thorn-fanged brier ;
Poppies hang forth their flags of fire :
Swarms of flies, with murmuring tune,
Tremulous dance in glittering noon,
Impelled by some instinctive choice,
Living they must needs rejoice.

Bees aflight for clover fields,
Forage for what their fragrance yields ;

Yellow banded bees whose chime,
With buzzing shakes the purple thyme :
Haunting now the blackberry bloom,
Now headlong plunged in golden broom,
Thronging swarm round blossoming limes,
And drone their muffled drowsy rhymes ;
Toil, as though from toil released,
Exultant in their honey feast ;
Delights that new delights disclose ;
Perfume that from sweetness flows,
Where beauty, fragrance, both display
Charms to lure their honied way :
Rejoicing, these all gleeful live,
Pleasure receive, and pleasure give.

Now through blaze of afternoon,
Sinks the world to utter swoon.
Heat blurs the outline of the hill ;
The flapping wind falls dead and still.
Labour's lagging sounds decrease,
Dropped in dream of slumbering peace.
Hushed seem the babble of the brook,
The languid caw of drowsy rook ;
The grasshopper's thin brassy chirr
Dizzily seems alone to stir.

Subtle aroma wide diffused,
Perfumes the air, from fir-tips bruised.
Battlemented pines on high,
Crenelate the saintly sky.
Down the blue, bird-haunted gloom,

That fills this tassel-vaulted room,
The wood's green tunnels, wanders lone
The murmuring stock-dove's all day moan.

To pleasant reverie resigned,
Beneath the spreading larch reclined,
Remote from clamorous crowd and riot,
Sanctuary take in nature's quiet.
Where through leaves bright sunbeams glance,
At the noiseless shadow dance.
Here watch where regal sunshine falls,
What countless courtiers round it calls ;
Sharded beetles, dragon flies,
Resplendent flashing jewelled dyes ;
While hovering in the slant sunbeams,
Flies hang poised in golden dreams.

The blue-barred jay wings noisy way,
From dancing outer spray to spray :
Awhile when silence gains her own,
Croons again the wild dove lone ;
Swift whirl of wing in passing starts
The blackbird, chuckling as he darts ;
A solitary robin sings,
From crimson throat defiance flings,
Then waits, bold warrior, light in eye,
With head aside, who dares reply.
Chirp of mother-bird, or call,
Comes feebly piped by fledgeling small ;
From firry realms the squirrel's mirth
Drops his plaything cone to earth.



While fluttering wind in poplar leaves,
Pattering like shower of rain, deceives.
Such trivial sounds the silence break,
Cares beguile, and pleasures wake ;
As overhead the breezes go,
Shadows palpitate below :
Shade with sunlight shafting through,
Happy world of breezy blue !

Light trips the wind on dainty feet,
Till creeps like smoke the rippling wheat.
In red-brown cornfields far below,
With white specks moving to and fro,
Where men toil noiseless as a dream,
And small as mites or emmets seem.
The reaper's hook his pathway cleaves :
The binder's arms embrace the sheaves ;
Children and women soon will group,
And 'mid the stubble gleaning stoop :
Waggons drive off, whose flaky ledges
Will trick with twig-plucked straw the hedges,
Then rumble down with lumbering loads,
Blue-shadowed lonely country roads.

Shifting splendours of the skies
Blushing blend their changing dyes,
When sunset's flood of gold o'erwhelms
Homestead, wood, long-shadowed elms,
Whose outmost twigs new light diffuse,
Sparkling with bright prismatic hues.

Such like sights the reaper sees,
When plodding home from upward leas ;
Past where the sun's last lingering beam
Still goldens fields where white flocks dream.
With sickle hooked on arm he turns,
While the red west yet redder burns.
Scampering rabbits frisk together,
Their white tails twinkling in the heather.
The booming beetle blunders by ;
Shrill whistling swifts are soaring high,
And lagging rooks float idly home,
Or through the amber sun-glow roam.

The sunset's conflagration vast
Red splendour hath o'er all things cast :
Crimson streaks the trunks of trees,
Crimson paves the sunward leas.
The red-rimmed orb its glowing lips
Far off in crimsoned ocean dips :
Then golden benediction giving,
Smiles farewell to all things living.

Dusk falls : the red-edged moon's vast shield
Glow broad and bright o'er hill and field,
Swims o'er the mist and cloudy rack ;
Whilst o'er her disc the bramble black
All straggling lies, and folded sheaves
Glimmer between the orchard leaves.
All the world in golden gleam,
Dreams on its grand and solemn dream.

Maturer glories round her massed,
Autumn's lethargic splendour passed ;
Rich hues in heaven and earth ablaze,
Diffused through gold and crimson haze,
O'er dreaming woodlands, cornfields brown,
Illumined earth's triumphant crown ;
Afterglow in summer's rear,
Aureole of the dying year.
Abundance flashed in every glance,
The world lay hushed in misty trance ;
Trees and hills appeared to sight,
Floating poised in liquid light.

Stately, in magic robes arrayed,
The sallowing elms begin to fade.
Far off, through air pellucid seen,
Shines yellow charlock bright and keen.
Before th' autumnal tempest blusters,
Hop-bines dangle golden clusters,
Hips grow scarlet on the brier,
Berries of mountain ash like fire ;
Tall yellow bracken stems uphold
Roof of bronze and green and gold.
Where sprays of blood red bramble burn,
On hill slopes brown with dying fern,
Goldfinches busy up and down,
Peck the bursting thistle-crown,
While oft the robin winds again
His wistful sudden warbling strain.
Each moment brings renewed delight,
From call of morn to hush of night.

Over the orchard hedge is seen
The ladder in the fruit-trees lean ;
Where red-cheeked apples heaped in mass,
Or strewn on sunshine-spotted grass,
Autumn's rich abundance tell,
Sweetening the air with fruity smell.
Stored with honey straw-built hives
Are silent, scarce a bee survives ;
Rickyards are crowded, garth well packed,
With billets for the hearth-fire stacked :
While from the barn the flail resounds,
With muffled thumps and dull rebounds.

✍ Evening draws nigh : the peasant slowly
Plods toward his cottage, straw-roofed, lowly.
For him stands wide the welcome hatch,
The blue smoke curls above the thatch ;
Fragrant wood smoke hangs on the air ;
What sight to him on earth more fair,
Than this twinkling point of fire,
That through the gloom still draws him nigher ?
Forth trotting in the road to greet him,
Runs his bright-haired child to meet him ;
Leads him to his hearth-side place,
Love lighting up his toil-worn face ;
Climbs his knees, his bosom seeks,
Kisses with warm soft lips his cheeks.
Children's prattle, wifely smile,
All his weariness beguile.
Faces to him most loved on earth,
Shine in the firelight of his hearth ;

Though all the world be darkening round,
Light and love in home are found.

Let fall, O twilight, soft unfurled,
Thy blue veil o'er this peaceful world !
Hide the dim blur of far off town,
Dusky hamlet, lonely down,
All merged in evening's gathering grey,
As tenderly dies the glimmering day ;
Dies off the pool whose gleam of white,
Seems like the ghost of day's dead light.
Rooks cawing round the elm-trees' breast,
Have settled, silent, to their rest.
Up and down, through velvet night,
Flickers the bat in noiseless flight.
Couched in the orchard cattle lie ;
The sheepfold's drowsy bleatings die.
Hedge-birds rustling where they will,
Finding their shelter, straight grow still ;
Chickens twitter, quiet then,
Warm nested 'neath the mother hen.
Smallest sounds all slowly cease,
Dropped and drowned in night's great peace :
Far down the road, in fading light,
The last wayfarer gives, " Good Night ! "

Dead silence the broad landscape fills ;
Sparkle the stars above the hills,
Gemming night's cloudy raven tress,
Sprinkling the azure's boundlessness,
While casting round the wearied globe
Night's imperial purple robe.

The setting moon till midnight hour
Floods dreaming hamlet, belfry tower,
Floods white God's acre, where, at last,
Man sleeps, when noise of life is past.
Night's lonely vault of darkening sky
Only shows heaven neighbouring by ;
A splendid star-roofed chamber spread,
High canopy o'er earth's low bed ;
Where, folded to their mother's breast,
Hushed in deep slumber all things rest.

V

AVERNUS.

THE scene dissolves : through cloud and haze,
Pictures new arrest the gaze.
Morning breaks, though breaks in gloom,
With dawn that presage seems of doom.
Blank foggy depths, chaotic, dense,
Balk the wondering wildered sense ;
Till fringing clouds all tempest torn
Lifting show a world forlorn :
White rain-drops line the dripping eaves,
And, pattering, rattle on dead leaves ;
Gaunt, melancholy sunflowers droop,
And o'er the smitten garden stoop,
Whose frost-nipped blossoms, wilted bines,
Broken lattice, shattered vines,
Tell naught but ruin. Rains, hoarse floods,

Shout havoc through the storm-drenched woods.
Leaden sky, hoof-trampled clay,
Funereal light of darkening day,
Wail of wind that hustles by,
Heaving a laboured mournful sigh,
Drear sounds, dread sights, as though some check
Now threatened universal wreck.
Ah! the darkness gathered fast!
Ah! my pleasant dream was past!
Virgin bloom and freshness gone,
Wreck only left to look upon.

Storm-splintered, leafless boughs flung high
Agonise against the sky :
Around, a hoarfrost world outspreads,
Where bents through snow thrust withered heads ;
Rooks with feathers puffed by frost,
And famished blackbirds, dazed, are lost ;
Crows with down-dropped feet below,
Alight to root among the snow.
Soon die the sun's wan pallid beams,
Off skeleton trees and ice-bound streams :
Frost fingers draw night's curtain shades,
While slow the dying landscape fades.
In shroud of snow, in silence dread,
Lies there a world in darkness, dead.

Beneath a black sepulchral sky
Groping I came where death passed by ;
Where spirits of all living things,
The year's prolific cycle brings,

Unnumbered, indistinct, and vast,
Thronging this awful roadway passed ;
Captives all from near and far,
Following death's triumphal car.

What footfalls these, as of a nation,
Now challenged startled expectation,
That vaguely gathering, gathering near,
Distincter heard, fell yet more clear ?
Then knew I as with instinct's ken,
These passing by were souls of men ;
Who, journeying down that trackway stern,
Which myriads tread, whence none return,
Here ranked and ranged, in grim succession,
Unbroken went in dread procession ;
Though faintly outlined to the sight,
Yet seen in their own spectral light.

Eager, thrilled with strange emotion,
I gazed upon this human ocean,
That flowing swept in awful stream,
A solemn, dread, unearthly dream :
Gazed on dusk faces, faces glad,
Wearied, hopeful, trustful, sad :
Myriads of appealing faces,
Rank by rank still changing places.
Pilgrims come from mortal strife,
All sobered by the pangs of life ;
Travellers all from earthly bourn,
Through darkness to unclouded morn.
Amidst the throng before me mingled,

One face, most dear to me, I singled :
Upleaped my heart, my hands reached high,
To hail with loudly welcoming cry !

* * * * *

The spell is loosed : the vision gone :
Deep silence holds the woodside lone :
Placid beneath its cloudy bar
Still shines the ruddy evening star ;
Under light fronds of arching fern,
The glow worms' golden lamps yet burn :
Fast o'er hamlet, wood, and town,
Glimmering eve now darkens down.

THE END



BRAMBLE CLOISTERS

BY

JOHN WATKINS PITCHFORD.

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MDCCCXCIX

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BRAMBLE CLOISTERS,

PROEM.

THE quiet thoughts that come in quiet scenes,
The open country, and the fresh pure air,
The pleasant green of fields, wanderings through woods,
In lanes all bramble-roofed, o'er breezy downs,
The silence, the unutterable peace
Of nature's leisurely world, these are my theme.
No high strung flight of passionate constraint :
Times are for strains heroic ; such, not now ;
But snatches caught from busied prisoned years,
Sprung from brief leisure, writ for leisure hours,
And disengagement of the resting mind.
Conned in the hearth's red light, or corner seat,
When shine the roofs with rain, and windows stream,
Loud gusty winds bellowing about the world ;
Or, haply, stretched amongst the hillside thyme,

In the dear quiet of the summer's day,
 There may my book be read ; there let it breathe
 Deep restfulness, and unexacting peace.
 For I would have it like to a tangled wood,
 Down the dusk silence of whose fragrant aisles
 Trip faintest footfalls of light fluttering winds
 Among the leaves, with surge and slumbrous hush,
 Fresh piny smell, twitter and chirp of bird,
 Glimpses of distant sky through drooping boughs,
 Blue hills, while near, in fair disorder strewn,
 Brambles and vines and many a lurking flower :
 A book of rest, musings on tranquil things,
 Cloister and hermitage of gentle thought,
 In God's great quiet world of let alone.

I.

NATURA NATURATA.

AS changeful as the ever-varying sky,
 Flecked with light clouds, with sombre gray diffused,
 Or absolute vault serene of speckless blue,
 As if the canopy of heaven itself,
 Scarce but for two successive points of time
 Holding one aspect, so this mighty scene
 And splendid pageantry of nature moves
 With varying meaning charged, eternal truths
 Blent in sublime majestic harmony.
 Wrapped in conventionalities, sore robbed
 By exigencies of these thronging days,
 The quickening hurry and the deafening din
 The garden of the soul all trampled down

By rabble rout of cares, fruitless, untilled,
Scarce may we glean what primal influence
Nature first wielded, touch, and moulding power :
When, not alone a propylon of heaven,
Sanctuary and refuge of divinest thoughts,
But temple noblest, reared by Hand Divine,
Filled with all lovely sights, all ravishing sounds
To countervail time's wearying sufferances,
And raise to larger and sublimer hopes.

Still lurks the serpent in life's paradise.
Impure, unreverent, the prurient soul,
That in her cloistral gloom its garbage seeks,
Finds what it brings : her unclad chastity,
Her stainless purity serve but to feed
Lust's ravenous flame : satyrs with grinning leer,
Fauns gamesome, white-armed nymphs glance 'mid her leaves
And vanish down her glades. A drowsy realm,
Land of the lotus, where luxurious ease
With poppy fumes drugging the rational thought,
Robs the unguarded soul of her high gift
Of quick intelligence. The vigilant mind,
With reverence shielded, with fixed purpose bent
To search past figure, mode, environment,
For meanings hid, temptation finds to rest
In blind idolatry of natural shapes,
Figures cherubic broidered on the veil,
Voluptuous rapture, form, or vanishing grace.

Vested in purity must he draw near
Who fain would worship at this glorious shrine ;
For nature, pure as the bright mountain brook,
That, sullied, leaps from rock to jutting rock,

And leaves behind its grosser sediment,
Reflects the glories of her loveliness,
As in the mirror of some placid lake,
In pure unruffled tranquil breasts alone.

With reverence too ; for the unreverent mind
Bursts an intruder in her solitudes.

Like when a hasty step or sudden sound
Makes sudden stillness in the beechen woods,
Hushing the woodlark's pipe, the linnet's trill,
And broken chorus of the chirping brakes,
So, to the hard unsympathetic mind,
The visible scene becomes a drowsy void,
Silent, or with presumptuous echoes charged
Of the invader's thoughts. Nature is full
Of awe, as of the presence of her King
E'er mindful ; and to reverent souls alone
Will she disclose her dark-veiled mysteries.
Full willingly the mind must yield itself
To all the soft enchantment of the hour.

When the ploughed field, whose ice-glazed furrows long
Have frost-bound lain scourged by the bitter sky,
Through the black winter, if the south wind blow,
And sunshine kiss the furrowed hillside bleak,
The iron ridges crumble into dust,
Till fresh rich mould awaits the sower's hand :
Thus, in the docile and receptive mind,
The gentle teachings of the natural world,
The cloud's soft lesson, and the whispers light
Of twinkling rain upon the growing grass,
The sweet evangel from the pasque flower's lips,
The still small voice that breathes from shadowy hills,

Or evening's dusk-enveloped landscape wide,
Fall as good seed in fructifying ground.

The world is ever fresh. Man comes and goes ;
Mouldering, his works decay, his treasures lie
Cobwebbed, corroded, lost and strewn in dust,
Whilst this great varying scene renews itself.
Rough autumn gales whirl clouds of fallow leaves,
And strew them fluttering o'er the sodden sward ;
Fierce rains are flung from darkly fringing clouds ;
The blanched stripped landscape, desolate and bare,
Sinks beneath wintry snow ; yet will again
The primrose pierce the oak's shed matted leaves,
And earth in all her virgin freshness smile,
When at the gate of the returning year
The missel-thrush and lark with shrill sweet strains,
Bid tardy spring awake her daffodils.

Creation like some wondrous scroll unwinds,
Within, without, in living hieroglyphs,
Divinely writ. Here spreads a full ripe field
Where thou mayst garner, gleanings not chance ears,
For all the golden harvest is thine own.

O glorious vision ! loveliness undreamed !
World pictures, pictures of the depths unplumbed,
Star-sown, and of this dear familiar earth,
Robed in her tissue beauty, tremulous
With throbbing life. Here we may wondering look,
Nor can disdain, disparage, disesteem,
Or secular hold, or tainted so fair scene
Which its Creator first pronounced as good.

There is an inward light that glorifies
The outward physical world, an inward glow,

Like evening's golden flood that softly drowns
In luminous tide etherial earth and sky,
Burns on the lake, flashes from mountain tops,
Gilds with its dazzling brilliance field and grove,
Crowding with splendour all the pulsing heavens.
The soul and nature are but counterparts ;
Blent in close union in the exalted mind
Nature her highest functions will discharge ;
A veil, which shrouding awful Deity
From man's too curious gaze, dimly reveals :
Or, robed in regal vestments, she becomes
Handmaid of God to minister to man.

Vision sublime ! no mocking pageantry,
A mirage in the boundless depths of space,
To lure the eager thought, perplex the mind
Inert. But, in these goings forth of God,
There are that kindle to intenser life
The fires of mortal being : not in vain
They call the wondering soul, in vain inspire
The awe-struck spirit, conscious though entranced,
Bringing it forth from its dark sensual world
To range these ampler fields, and here to learn
That man is one with nature ; that from him,
Chief of her sons, her chief interpreter,
Submission to her just decrees she claims,
Co-operation with her purposes;
Obvious, or dimly seen, within the plane
Of this his frail existence, tending e'er
To aims unrecognised, beyond his ken ;
So in the use, the drift, and harmony
Of things created deeper rest to find.

THE IDYLL OF THE DAWN.

Through nature's beauties multiform the soul
Mounting ascends, as by heaven's shining stairs,
To gaze on Beauty, absolute, divine,
And gazing find supreme beatitude!

II.

THE IDYLL OF THE DAWN.

HUSHED, indistinct, the shrouded landscape lies :
Silent, deep-buried, in a gloom profound,
A world where darkness broods, all undisturbed.
Long since the lingering sunset's western warmth
Has died, and with it ceased flicker of bat,
Field-cricket's chirp, or song of woodlark poised
High in mid-air. The owl on down-fringed wing
Has to the belfry swept, the night-jar fled
To guard its nestless eggs. Night's vast dark void
Seems like a chaos, when the dawn first breaks.

Now o'er the eastern heavens a tremulous glow
Shivering through darkness dies in deeper gloom.
A tender light auroral gently steals,
Flushing night's sable cheek. Lacing the clouds
The silvery flood of radiance throbbing darts,
Filling the orient arch. The level mist,
Edged with upcurling waves of fleecy clouds,
Fires with the glow, and the awakening wind,
As with a sigh of animation, stirs
Earth's cloudy canopy. Now quivering spring
Far-darting vigorous rays through the dim dream
Of liquid mellow light, where dappled clouds,
Crimson and amber, ride like argosies

Adrift upon a sea of molten gold.

Vapours sun-tinged loom high with beetling fronts,
Rearing a broad-vanned portal, through whose gates
The king of day to wondrous triumph comes.
With gorgeous hues the vivid pageant glows,
And, ere the sun's first rays smite the dusk earth,
Its level roof of murky cloud divides,
And, in the tender awful light of dawn,
As new-created, stands a world revealed.

The shrill and lusty crow of early cock
Rings from the barn-yard ; 'neath the cottage eaves
Twitter the swallows. Soon the soft low call
Of morning wakes earth's myriad slumberers.
The road's white dust smells of the dew ; the air
Breathes pure and clean. Now 'twixt the orchard trees,
O'er hedges dew-bespangled, sunbeams flash,
Reddening and warm. A murmurous hum of bees
Sounds near the hives among the hollyhocks.
Flies buzz beneath the elms ; chirp, twitter, song,
Rustle of hasty wing, fill the glad air.
The joyous-throated lark, too glad for earth,
Mounts skyward ; while, far-off, the blackbird's tune,
Leisurely warbled in full rounded tones,
'Mid sparkling poplar leaves, make sweet the hour.
The hoary dew glistens upon the grass ;
Mists trailing lift from the blue shining woods,
Out of whose purple depths come gentle tones
Of cooing doves, happiest of happy birds.
Cutting and diving through the freshened sky
Of cloudless heaven, the arrowy swallows dart.
Ere curling wreaths of pillared smoke creep forth

From cottage chimneys, hid in garden trees.
The satchelled mower, scythe on shoulder, comes,
From cottage doorway arched with clambering rose,
With leisurely stride, in whistling corduroys,
His sniffing lurcher trotting at his heels,
Bound for the water-meadows near the brook.
Rabbits are frisking on the sandy slopes,
With ears up-pricked in quaint and scampering fear ;
The cawing of the rooks comes from the elms,
Softened by distance in the sunny hour.
Faint hush and whisper of the brook are heard,
Gurgling its way through rush and quivering reed,
With distant lowing of deep-uddered cows
Penned in the orchard. Clouds of gnats on wing,
And flies, zig-zagging in the morning sun,
Fill the live air with pleasant murmurous hum.
Tapping of woodpecker among the boughs,
Rustle of squirrel, snap of twig, slight sounds,
All in the tranquil hour distinctly heard.
Swallows are ruffling in the road's white dust,
Regardless of the passing labourer's step,
Who goes a-whistling to his work. Hard by,
Young bullocks play with interlocking horns,
Then, straying down the field towards the brook,
Leave straggling lines upon the dew-white grass,
Dried quickly in the sun. Thick insect swarms
Brush the clear by-pools of the gliding brook,
Here smooth, there stippled o'er with mimic waves,
Where stirs the water-rat amongst the cress,
Rubs his broad nose, then, by the footstep startled,
Takes refuge in the flags. Mid-stream the swan,

Bridling its stateliness, its plumage trims,
Or with strong pinions lashes the clear wave
To foam, closing its broad white wings to float
Upon its dazzling shadow. Jingling teams,
With harness glittering in the morning sun,
Pass on the highroad, sorrel, piebald, bay,
Stretching the crinkled flank, tossing the mane,
With red distended nostrils drinking in
The sharp cool breeze of morn. Then, in their dust,
With bleatings manifold, high-pitched or low,
Nodding their heads, trot past the pattering flock,
While from the rear, with high important tail,
Follows the sheep-dog. Now the shepherd's call
Rings doubly shrill. Under the orchard trees,
The milkmaid, singing, comes, fresh-cheeked, bright-eyed,
Her milking pail a-tilt beneath her arm.
Odour of new-cut grass drifts on the air.
Now rides the sun, pouring o'er wood and field,
Hamlet, and cottage gardens bright with dew,
His golden rays. The mighty world's astir.

III.

THE BUILDING OF THE BIRDS.

ERE the sweet summer come with boom of bee,
And grasshopper's faint chirr in blinding noon,
And sharp shrill whisk of burnished flies goes past,
In the fresh prime and blossom of the year,
When, from the settled blue of later spring,
The lark, high-poised, shakes forth delirious song,
And loitering odours float about the fields

From blowing clover and white flowering bean,
Glad thought roams forth in this green fairy-land,
As happy as the goldfinch, when the sun,
Through the last diamonds dropped by passing shower,
Gleams on the speckled may-bloom round its nest.
How fresh and still the sunny landscape lies,
Lulled with soft undertones of surging woods !
Morn rings with music, rapture in the sky,
Rapture on earth from copse, and heath, andholt,
With low sweet undertwitter of the wood,
Or, boldly shaken forth in fuller song,
Where from bunched oak leaves sings the flirting thrush,
Brisk bold-eyed thrush whose pure far-launching strain
Rings through the dusky hushing of the pines ;
The rippling fern laughs as the breeze goes by ;
Bright sunlight streaming 'twixt the moving boughs.

O glad and happy world, radiant with joy !
Wherein the lowest least considered things
Rejoice, yea, even things inanimate ;
Brisk balmy airs, flowers moist with dew, the fields
Fresh with their liveliest green, the smiling sky,
Seem all transfused with universal joy.
The laughing sunbeams smite the moving boughs,
The very shadows dance, the woods exult,
The glittering brooklet singing as it goes ;
The multitudinous world would leap for joy.
E'en the small crook-legg'd fly with burnished wings,
Jewelled, so small as scarce discernible,
That finds a world upon the extended palm,
A forest in the glistening hairs that shine
Upon the blackberry leaf, spreads tiny wings.

Fresh scent of grass cropped by the grazing kine,
And horned honeysuckle's creamy bloom,
Clambering the close-pleached hedge, perfume the air.
Quaint shining starlings 'mid the daisies nod ;
White-bellied swallows in the dizzy blue
Circle aloft, or twittering dive and shoot.
Hard by, 'neath cottage eaves, or lichened barn,
Their clay-built nest on joist of rafters fixed,
Lined with dead grass and feathers, snugly hides.

Now is the heaven of birds. Well pleased the eye
Follows the warblers to their hidden homes,
The centre of each little world, concealed,
Yet with melodious publishment proclaimed.
Where orchards blossom, apple, cherry, pear,
Or hedge-rows foam with hawthorn's fragrant bloom,
The tiny builders 'neath their penthouse sweet
Pour their glad life in song. The chaffinch brood,
Nested in fork of blossoming red may,
All open-beaked, stretch out their callow necks,
Clamouring for food. The crested lark in bower
Of the field daisies hides its speckled eggs,
Peers down the grass-paths with black beady eyes,
Or in the lush green corn, whence rising oft,
Allured in quivering rapture to the sky,
It mounts, sings of its love, its grassy nest
Below, rich with dusk wealth. The warble soft
Of the gold-crested wren betrays its home,
Cup-shaped and mossy, lined with spider's web,
With lichens bound, 'neath shelving fir-branch roof,
Swayed in the wind that sweeps with sullen roar.
Here, on the ground, strewn with brown coppice leaves,

Under a canopy of withered ferns,
And jag-toothed brier, the pheasant guards her eggs,
Neighbour'd with primrose blooms and hyacinths,
Where scampering rabbits gambol near at dusk.

When the red sorrel seeds, and the rough hedge
Waves its loose growth of bine and wanton brier,
Dog roses blossom, scent of meadow-sweet
Hangs on the air, nests the brown nightingale,
In plummy world of swaying seedling grass,
And, when the glow-worm lights his gold green lamp,
Tells from its brier, hushing the glimmering dusk,
With rapture passion'd as the soul of love,
Tells to the solemn moon that tops the downs,
With upturned bill, tells to the listening stars,
The mystery of its small imprisoned life.
The linnet's clear and happy noonday song
Rings from the crackling furze and red stemmed briers,
When flickers past the loitering butterfly,
And in the yellow gloom of golden gorse,
Sounds angry drone of burly humble bees ;
All in a world of sunny quiet hushed,
With moveless cloud o'erhead, and fluttering breeze.

The coot 'mid bladed sedge, marsh marigolds,
Bent flags, and flood-washed reeds, and lily leaves,
Lays its black-spotted eggs where lipping waves
Of hurrying streamlet chant their endless song.

Cruising at leisure down the hawthorn hedge,
The blackbird lights, then from his orange bill
Throws forth rich melody, as 'twere the voice
Of the hushed crocus twilight-; to the world,
Silent and listening, all the vast dim world,

Pours forth its love's sweet ditty, simple cares,
To guard the treasure of its little life,
Its jewels of blue eggs, in casket laid
Of clay-built masonry with grass stems lined,
Thorn-bound, with infinite small labour raised,
Through cowslip-smelling weeks of early May.

Pleasant it is to ramble then through woods,
In cloisters green, sun-shot, draw easy breath
Under the beechen roof, to hear the brook
Soft singing in the wood's sweet madrigal,
A lulling whisper in the cool green dusk
Tender and low, now troubling through its thorns,
Towards the brown pool beneath the wide-branched oak ;
There dreaming cattle stand, chewing the cud,
And toss the head, or whisk the swinging tail,
Or, fetlock deep, splash through from shore to shore.
Musing its tune, the brook, like singing thoughts
That pass unbidden through the mind, and make
Sweet music as they go, flows forth again
Crinkling bright ripples, where the sunbeams tilt
Brave coloured on the waving minnow's scales.

Now in the glad and silent sunshine bask,
List to the wind, and watch the white-edged clouds,
Or rooks that rising from the hedgerow elms
Circle aloft with peaceful clamorous caw,
Far dying in the noonday's dreamy blue.
The finch, that, self-contained, has perched hard by
Upon the mullein stalk, repeating still
His one unvaried song, now silent grows.
No fear of coming ill darkens the hour,
To rob it of its brightness and its peace.

Here many a sweetness lurks. The mind at rest,
Responsive to all gentle influences,
Obedient as the clover to the wind,
Feeds on the silent beauty spread around,
Muses, and lets the antic fancy drift,
Like feather's tiny shallop on the stream :
Still hearing in its dreaming reverie
The goldfinch on the elm-branch twittering shrill,
The piercing smoothness of the robin's tune,
The tender fluting of the woodlark's song,
The ditty of the chaffinch, or mayhap
The willow wren's delicious warble low :
Filch from sweet nature's flower her honeyed stores,
Drink from the Lethe of her restfulness,
Take heart, and smile exacting care away.

IV.

OUT WITH THE MOWERS.

COOL, moist, and fresh, the clear, pellucid morn,—
So clear each spray, each twig, thrust in clear air,
Stands forth distinctly bright and visible,
As new-created,—'neath its thorny crown,
Smiles through baptismal dew. Silent the world,
Save for the blackbird's golden orisons ;
Till the thrush feels the sun upon his wings ;
Or laggard lark, nested in mowing grass,
Oblivious, simple wight ! what noon may bring,
Darts skyward, pouring from morn's freshened blue
Strains of ecstatic joy. With plodding steps,
Their wandering voices o'er the hedgerow borne,

Now down the dew-damp lane the reapers come ;
The gate latch clicks ; the lichen'd gate swings back.
How brave a picture all this flowery pomp,
Frained in these sighing woods, pathetic, fair !
Millions of lush green spires, white-rooted, thick,
Clover, lucerne, field daisies, shepherd's clocks,
Red waving plumes of sorrel, moving mass
Stand tipped with glistening drops of morning dew.
The redbreast's strains are flourished from the hedge,
From the near hawthorns white with lingering bloom,
The goldfinch sings his dear sweet innocent song,
Full of deep peace and tenderest memories.

Soon as the morning sun above the elms
Flings his red beams, the mower's work begins.
Well poised, with lusty stride and rhythmic stroke,
And vigorous sweep of sunbrowned sinewy arms,
The scythes rush through the grass, swish following swish ;
Till rank on rank, heaped in their odorous mounds,
Tumble the swaths, swept in one common fate
To ruin irretrievable. The wind,
Carrying the mowers' voices to and fro,
Tells when they happen on some treasure trove,
Rabbit, or squatted hare that leaping flies,
The nest of partridge, or poor minstrel lark,
Whose rush of fluttered wings, few notes forlorn
Bewail a ruined home : the mouse jumps forth ;
Or, through thick depths of grass and tangled bine,
The land-rail bolts with harsh discordant cry,
Now here, now there, heard through the day unseen.

So pass the morning hours ; the sun grows warm ;
The dew dries off ; shadows of neighbouring elms

Wheel slowly round. The chestnut's cool blue shade
Respite invites : the sweep of ravenous scythes
Ceasing awhile, now come, with glistening brows,
The breath-spent mowers for their first brief rest.

Her face half-hidden 'neath her sun bonnet,
A little girl her father's breakfast brings.
She sits ; while near, in sober consequence,
Her dog mounts guard. Above the voices rise
The varied sounds of village morning life ;
The milkmaid's song ; the whistling teamster's tune,
Faint clink of anvil from the blacksmith's forge,
Cackle of poultry in the barn-yard straw,
With challenging cockcrows flung across the fields
From homesteads near. Again the scythe's white gleam,
The tapping sound of tightening the curved blade,
Rough strokes alternate of the whetstone's edge,
Tell that the mowers recommence their toil.
Scattering the last light film of morning mist,
The sun full on their scarlet faces shines,
While all the air grows dizzying with the heat.

How pleasant then beneath the hawthorn tree,
Still white with blossoming may, as the wind brings
Faint acid smell from tumps of new-cut grass,
To catch the glitter of the water-fall,
Flashed through the bushes. Near the brook hard by,
Dusk with cool shade from overhanging boughs,
Beech, sycamore, and alders gathered round,
Margined by withies, nettles, water-mint,
The moor-hen finds her home. Midway across,
An island, thickly wooded with dwarf beech,
Affords safe nesting-place ; no sounds are heard,

Save those which rise in this secluded nook ;
Low water-tones in lulling liquid lapse,
Soft splash of trout that leaps at skimming fly,
Or, when a fleet of ducks sails proudly past,
Trumpeting boldly. There the blackbird comes,
Looks round, flisks water o'er his shining back,
Revels and rollicks in the silvery wave,
Then from a brier his dusky plumage preens,
And, with loud chuckle of delight, makes wing.
The sunbeams shifting pierce the lifting boughs,
To tip the dimpled pool with stars and gleams
That flash like diamonds. On the farther shore,
Where in green twilight stand the foxglove's spires,
Abode of peace, and silent breathing calm,
Crowd elder bushes patched with creamy bloom.
There, on a bank, lipped by the quiet waves,
Amid marsh marigolds and flowering rush,
Builds of dry sedge, the water hen, her nest ;
Thence warily leads forth her velvet chicks,
Uttering harsh cries of warning or alarm :
Strange lonely bird in self-possession lost,
Flicking its tail, then launching in the stream,
And, to safe distance, carrying off her brood.

Still through the sweltering heat the mowers ply
Their vigorous, honest, toil, with cheerful heart,
Now pausing, or to raise the keen-edged scythe
And wipe the blade with wisp of new cut grass,
Or with the stone re-sharpen. From cool shade
They bring the costrel, and with cider quench
Their drowsy throats ; balanced on outstretched legs
Some from the runlet drink, more decently

Some from the drinking cup of bullock's horn.
 An old man, tottering, leaning on his stick,
 Shuffles afield, of old days garrulous,—
 Huge swaths, gigantic tasks, uproarious glee,—
 When men were men. With blithe and bantering jest,
 A horn of cider they the veteran give,
 Then laughingly resume their jocund toil.

Hark, in the pauses of the wind-borne shouts,
 That now usurp the silence of the field,
 To the wild revelry of morning birds,
 Shrill strains of speckled thrushes mad for joy,
 The wood-pigeon's low, soothing, dreamy moan,
 The cuckoo's shout, this side or that, the din
 Finches and sparrows raise, the robin's note :
 While high in freshness of the morning blue
 White mounded clouds sail o'er a peaceful world.

v.

NATURA NATURANS.

A mystic element in nature dwells,
 A solemn awfulness from which the soul
 Surprised, starts back. The azure vault of heaven
 Seems like a conscience in its purity,
 As though its distant, fixed, and infinite depths
 Reproached the separate life. This side the veil
 We ponder nature's meanings, oft perplexed,
 As one who pores on some strange manuscript,
 The cipher lost. First elements we lack,
 Blending and touch, the grasp of mastery :
 Yet secret relegation find instead,

As man were but some unconsidered part,
Quaint sport of chance, victim of destiny,
Pent in the narrow range of human things,
Yet outcast, alien from the larger life ;
Reading his petty renderings 'twixt the lines
Of the great volume of the natural world :
Holding all things existent but for him,
Creation's marvellous scenes e'er moving on,
Regardless of his notice or concern :
Nature being all to him ; he naught to her,
Naught more than withered leaf trod i' the mire.

Yet are there times the commonest scene unfolds,
Bating its rigours, offering to the mind
New meaning, sympathy, and strange delight.
The breezy hillside, or the woodland path,
The fresh green light in spring from wood and field,
When round the elm-tree bolls the million buds
Swarm like a cloud of motionless green flies ;
The gentle aspect of a tender sky ;
The sea's broad floor of dimly quivering waves ;
The soft fair eyes of dew-blurred morning flowers ;
Trembling of grass blades in an April rain ;
The sunny quiet of the open fields ;
All a strange brightness wear, standing suffused
In radiance not their own, but to the mind
Intelligent, invested, offering now
A wealth of truth on every jewelled thorn ;
In glance of rambling brook, the hedgerow's bloom,
When swallows, with their backs of glossy blue,
New come, perch in the blossoming damson trees,
In spring's bright buds, and autumn's pensive flowers,

All trivial things, if aught in nature's realm
Be counted trivial, seeming cognisant,
And weighted with the destiny of man.

Nor in unfriendliness : a banquet,—spread
By infinite beneficence, a spirit
Cognate, though far removed,—is furnished forth
With heavenly dainties for the hungering soul,
God's thoughts of love in thoughts of beauty shrined,
Mightiest of things to men, issues that mould
Life's weal, most intimate, being here rehearsed,
Mirrored, though dimly, every passing hour,
In changes swift, and swiftly wrought results.

Nor is man uninvited : countless tones
Of natural melody drift on the air,
With soft appeals to inward consciousness,
Luring the sensitive and shrinking mind :
A thousand graces, colours, gleams, and forms,
Attract the thought that lingers in the gloom
And prison-cell of doubt. Freedom is here ;
The freshness of the air, soft peaceful day,
The ever-changing light upon the land,
The tranquil aspect of the open fields,
Large sky, bland silence brooding o'er them all,
Unlock with gentle hands care's grievous chains,
Lift from the back its burden, bid us rise,
Come forth and range in this great paradise
Of nature's realm, not with restricted mind,
Caitiff, with furtive glance, but unrestrained,
Most welcome. Then a power will subtly blend
The reverent soul with the material scene ;
Not to destroy the individual life,

But to exalt, shaming its weaknesses,
And summoning from the sleep of drowsy death
Thwarted ambitions, consecrating hopes,
Long cherished secretly, with sanction grave
Stout buttressing the venturous confidence.

The larger aspects of the natural world
Chiefly affect the soul, with influence
Most potent, formative in its effects.
The distant awfulness of dawn, the light
That ebbs by slow gradations in the west,
Where, on the horizon, dark blue couching hills
Stretch prone along the golden sunset sky ;
The desolate leaden gloom that fills the east,
Solemn penumbra of the coming night,
With sense forlorn of vacancy and loss ;
The moveless clouds high balanced in the blue,
In utter peacefulness, as if the world
Had fall'n upon its last eternal rest ;
Sometimes the broad expanse of open sky,
The realm of light, unbounded, conscious seems,
Compassionate, with tenderness suffused,
As if it throbbed in mighty sympathy
For man's brief errant life, his yearnings deep,
Deep longing, fervent hope of human souls :
The mountain peak with heaven's fixed azure crowned,
And the dim element of earth beneath,
Or starlit dome of the imperial night,
Depths fathomless, startling the venturous thought :
These ceaseless work with unsuspected power.

Yet nature ever shows a graciousness,
To docile minds, attent, a friendliness,

Oft to the patient and observant eye
Opening fresh glimpses of her wondrous world.
We change : our life is girt around with death,
Like to the lily's cincture of dead leaves ;
Dead thoughts, dead hopes, cherished ideals dead.
Onward we pass ; the soul's habiliment
Wears threadbare, its environment is changed.
Yet nature has in her perpetual youth,
A beauty never changing, never dead,
And all her beauty and her youth are ours.
For, leaving self, vain hopes that mar the life,
Regarding with a not incurious eye
The beings once we were, unconscious builders !
Pitying our baseless fears, unconscious too
What form our future being may assume,
We yet rejoice to find the true, the good,
The beautiful remain, and we in them,
If but the soul, in a diviner strength,
Hold steadfast on its high immortal way.

Nor for this end alone the plastic hands
Of mighty nature are stretched out to man.
What gentle agencies command the hour
Give the soul sunshine, help to cleave the spathe,
That sheathes the flower of pure humanity :
Nor with a passive ministry alone,
To gratify dull sense, the craving feed
Of sentiment, but in exalted work ;
To unfold a world most wondrous, framed and stored
To arouse, sustain, exalt man's noblest gifts,
Revealing all the inner life of things,
Stranger than all our thoughts, mysterious power,

That with its secret force lays hold of man,
Unconscious all, and with smooth onward sweep
Resistless, bears him to far destinies.

VI

A NORTH DEVON STREAMLET.

TO fame unknown, unnamed, unchronicled,
Marked but by lawyers in their parchment deeds,
By farmers thought of but in frost or flood,
A thread of waters straggling 'midst the hills,
With querulous tone, as it had lost its way,
In course so troubled, casual, errant, brief,
Nor could discover other guide than chance ;
Now near its end : deep in the hills that rear
Their purple ramparts 'gainst the foaming sea,
Spurning the indignation of the waves,
It issues. Whence it springs, this summer morn,
Blue, cloudless, cool, with faintly whiffing breeze,
Whilst all around is vast and world wide peace,
Who cares enquire. Far on the moor, mayhap,
The soggy uplands crusted with green moss,
Where ghost-like pallid mists with hair astream,
Drift on the wind, and passionate savage gales
Rave out their fury, whence the Barle, the Bray,
The brawling Lyns find birth ; where wild stags drink,
Shaggy wild ponies whinnying race and snort.
Clad in its simple native loveliness,
Naught matters its brief past, now within call
Of the loud summoning billows of the deep.
Seated upon a stone, a boulder huge,

Marked with grey lichens, weather-smoothened, worn,
The extended foot may touch the further bank ;
Between the grassy slopes the stream glides past.
The red old rock around with ivy draped,
Edged with bright velvet moss, by terraces rise,
With glorious upward sweep towards the sky
Of the great hills, gorgeous with purple heather,
Blazoned with golden crust of blossoming furze,
Whence, as from bed of rich carnation bloom,
Come wafts of fragrance. Fenced with stones, a field
On neighbouring slope, is strewn with new mown grass.
In glorious silence, earth and sky asleep,
The streamlet's sound is to a thread diminished,
The linnet lilts among the crackling gorse,
The wind, sweeping through whistling bents, brings up
The smothered boom from the sea's foam-lined strand,
Eight hundred feet below. Upon a thorn
The clinging dewdrop's bright prismatic hues,
A lovely opaline merging from red
To green and purple, in the passing breeze
Scarce tremble. Countless dusty-headed bees
With surly hum, bent on their honeyed spoils,
Forage among the heather, here in clumps,
Through which grass stems protruding show like spears
Of mimic hosts, or loot the golden gorse,
Or humble cottage beauty of wild thyme.
With loud crescendo drone the humble bee,
Velvet and golden banded, blunders by,
Winnowing the common herd with eager wings.

Blue sky o'erhead, with dazzling white-edged clouds,
A fresh keen air, and clear bright look of all,

Gladden the thought. Far to the south extends
The sea's broad lavender plain, wrinkled and streaked.
A moving glitter paves the sun's wide path,
Else shadow-spotted, and, on either hand,
Faint muffling summer haze. A crow sweeps down,
Like bolt from bowstring shot ; poised in the blue
A falcon, circling, hangs on quivering wings.
Round the cliff's head resound the joyous cries
Of white-winged sea-birds, blending gently soft
With hush of the soft surge upon the shore.

The eye turns musingly to where the brook,
Emerging from its wilderness of briers,
Leaps glittering in its vigour to the light :
From tangled gorge, unclipped by scythe or billhook,
Where brambles, furze, a ragged horde, encamp,
Burdocks, and nettles, thistles armed with spikes,
Stout in their vantage, holding o'er the stream
A dense green canopy, the brooklet glides
With soft melodious murmurings on its way,
Now darting like bright serpent from the fern,
With waving lines of dark green water-weeds,
Now buried deep beneath its roof of thorns,
Once more to light of day outflowing clear,
Prattling with mossy stones, or, in dazed pools,
Dallying awhile. Here come the sheep to drink,
Picking their downward way on well-poised feet.
The swallow on its quiet waving wings
Swoops but to kiss the wave, then twittering flies.
Perchance when midnight broods upon the hills,
And in vast silence crackles the dry twig,
Through rifted cloud and driving mist, the moon,

Rising, discloses where the wild stag drinks.

On flows the stream in sunlight or in shade,
Now bending smooth its silver-threaded folds
Over some tiny precipice to drop,
In rocky basin scarce four feet below,
Diffusing rainbow spray, where moss and fern
In the moist air luxuriate. Overhead,
An ash tree, mounting from rock-clasping roots,
Rears its high cupola of spreading boughs.

How vast, these mighty and majestic hills,
Rising rough-cliffed, with scarred and craggy rocks,
Red, salmon coloured, grey with purple tones,
Ramparts deep-founded, bastions of the land,
Lions that on its threshold grandly couch !
What countless years have to oblivion swept
Since first toward heaven these battlements uprose,
Now peaceful as the battlements of heaven.
Like drift of thistle-down upon the wind,
Or shadow of a cloud upon the hills,
Man's fevered life seems but a transient thing,
Feeble, yet rooted firm in God's great care.
A heathery smell, like as from fresh turned mould,
Hangs on the air. The fitful wandering breeze
Whispers of meadow-sweet that lurks anear ;
By the fair presence of the stream allured,
There, at the streamlet's bend, beside a mass
Of dark green furze, its creamy plumelets wave.

On sky, on sea,—blue, misty, limitless,
With distant white sails dotted, mottled, streaked,—
And on the mounded hills and waiting trees,
A hush as if of expectation falls ;
This instant moment seems the meeting place

Of two eternities. The wavering thought,
As it had heard a voice from the great realm
Beyond the audible, the visible,
Listens, as poised above some vast abyss,
Blown like frail moth that to sweet floweret clings :
Loving this dear familiar earth, this life
Anxious, and perilous, it deeply broods
On the vast mysteries that enshroud man's lot :—
Atoms fortuitous, fate's victims, toys,
Whence come we into this great universe,
Why sent, why hurried hither, hurried hence,
Swept to the unexpected, the unknown,
Bound to what destiny, or nobler life,
Or to oblivion's vast unfathomed depths ?
What boots our anxious thinking and our fret,
Our grief that none can read nature's sealed book,
That none can lift the atlantean load.

The robin sings his pure contented song ;
Flies poise in air with buzz scarce audible ;
Far in the west the distant thunder growls ;
A shadow of a cloud drifts o'er the hills ;
A racket 'mid the gulls tells the hawk near.
The blackberry lifts its sprays of pallid bloom,
White under leaves, as beckoning to the stream
That silver-sandalled flies from one cascade
To where another waits : hither it comes,
Laughing in sunshine, mourning in its glooms ;
For all its cascades, shallows, wanderings, rocks,
Stony rebuffs and muddy slanderings,
Singing its low melodious song, with tone
Of gratitude that would be ever thus ;

Now gathering strength from rest in its dark pools,
'Scaped from its draff and runnel foam, it bounds
Sheer o'er the rock abrupt, in one last leap,
Plunging from view down the thick foliated chasm,
Deep down below, beyond the circling choughs,
Ending all murmurings in vast ocean's depths.

Thus much ; nor more ; nor all about a stream.

VII

THE MUSIC OF THE RAIN.

SKY troubled, dull, burdened with coppery clouds
Uprolled, huge piled on lurid basements dark,
Close, suffocating air that robs of life,
Hush to an ominous silence field and wood.
A melancholy wind, wandering as lost,
Goes sighing through the pallid shivering trees.
Then comes a lull, in which distincter still
Are heard the woodland sounds, the snap of twig,
Rustle of hedge mouse in the withered leaves,
Clap of wild pigeon's wing, or magpie's scream.
'Neath covered sky with clouds of deepening shade,
Darker, more stifling every moment grows.
The pool is dead, and with its brightness died
The brightness of the verdure of the fields,
And fresh green edges of the mounded woods.
Peopling the silence of the brooding gloom
Come strange mysterious mutterings, sounds confused,
Low moanings, vague uncertain whisperings,
As if the ghosts of former tempests waked,
And incoherent talked. An angry blast

Scout of the storm, sweeps from the leaden sky,
Snorting like war-horse rushing to the fray.
The poplars bend, the pines throw forth their roar,
While hair-like ravelled edges of black clouds
Shake out large spattering drops of rain that splash
Upon the beechen roof. A venom'd shaft
Of keen blue lightning thrids the dusky stems,
Quick followed by the deep-voiced thunder's roar,
Crashing o'erhead, that rolls prolonged away
O'er distant hills to die. Silence once more,
When nought but steady fall of rain is heard.
Again the vengeful spark bites through the gloom,
And, 'twixt rent portals of the clouds once more,
Vollies the thunder, with a shattering crash,
As if the twelve-fold battlements of heaven
Toppled to ruins : the deafening roar expands,
Rumbling with long reverberating roll,
Then dies in silence o'er a petty world.

The clattering jay screams forth on hurrying wing,
From the wet larches to the hollies' shade ;
The frightened stoat runs to the woodside bank.
Stillness again : till the impetuous rain,
Like knotted scourge wielded by angry heaven,
Smites with fierce hiss upon the leafy roof,
As if ten thousand angry serpents stung.
The air is filled with mist, scored with fixed lines
Of swift straight-pouring rain, till some wild gust
Sways back the branches of the woodside trees,
And slants the avenging arrows of the storm.
The clamour deepens : lusty oaks stretch forth
Their vain protesting boughs 'gainst wrathful heaven,

Stoutly to wrestle with the ruffian blasts.
A roar as of deep agony, a moan
Of helplessness, fill the drenched leafy world :
The branches grind, the shivering up-blown leaves
Huddled upon the boughs, surge like the sea.
Full throated brooks clamour with muddy wrath ;
While, at brief intervals, the thunder's roar
Swallows the petty strife of wind and rain.

Now comes a breathing space : the rising clouds
Pour forth a steadier flood whose minished strength,
Low whispering to the wide and listening woods,
Gently and soft, then, with a quickening speed,
Settles its tale to dead monotony :
Or, hurrying with its task, goes forth to deck
The mowing grass with sparkling diamond drops.

There is a music in the tinkling fall,
Light patter on the leaves, and liquid hush,
Whispering of kindliness, impartial care,
That all impatient of these leafy screens,
Jealous protection of o'erhanging boughs,
Would search their sweet withdrawing secrecies
To find the drooping weeds and lurking flowers,
The loftiest and the lowliest to affuse.

Sing on, O summer showers, your passion spent,
Sing on your embassy of strength and peace.
The gentle rustle of the grateful leaves,
That drink your large beneficence, and cool
Their parching veins in your fresh copious streams,
O river of heaven ! tells your blest ministry.
All drink from your pure wave ; the straight red pines
Rooted among the moist green light of ferns,

Yet rising, rank o'er rank, until they tower,
And sun themselves in rosy clouds of heaven,
The smooth stemmed beech, with ample generous shade,
Rough rinded elms, and quivering willows gray,
The lace like foliage of the silver birch,
Brambles and briers, lichens and gold green moss,
Where bright drops glisten on the ash-trees' boles.
A noise of waters fills the cooler air,
A fresh moist odour all the grateful world.

VIII

THE DUSK OF THE DELL.

C RISPED oaks umbrageous with their whisperings low,
Like a green glacier fill the valley's cleft
From bank to bank, softening the glare of day,
Blinding white oven-mouth of dizzy noon,
Making the dingle like a minster aisle,
Cool, solemn, still. The grey old trunks uprear
Their sturdy columns to the twinkling leaves,
Beeches smooth stemmed as if in conference lean,
While rays of golden sunshine slant athwart
The purple gloom. The dim cool light diffused
Broods on the lurking shade, mosaic wrought,
With dappled patches of its moving gold
Flecking the mossy ground, as now the wind
Lifts up the green veined leaves, and gives the sun
Bright access down the deep secluded dell.
A brook meandering winds its devious course,
Babbling among its stones, till it expands
Into a broad deep pool whose pensive calm,

Unswept by breeze intrusive, mirrors heaven,
Reflecting clouds that sail the blue serene ;
Tranquil, but for the lines of widening rings
Made by the drinking bird, or leaping fish.
Birch, willow, quivering aspen, drooping ash
Hang o'er their shadows. Here, in few short weeks,
Cinctured with reddening leaves, will autumn come,
All pensive, sicklied with approaching death,
And, with gaunt fingers of its frenzied blasts,
Will strip from struggling boughs their withering gear,
And strew the pool. Unruffled now all stands
Mature in summer beauty, leaf and flower.

The white-tailed rabbit, by the footstep scared,
Leaps through the fern. The racketing jay, the quest,
Startled among the interplaiting boughs,
Sweep down the cloistered wood on twinkling wing,
Soon in the tangled distance lost to view.

Such nooks the poets of antiquity
Have dreamed, sequestered, solemn, self-contained,
As though belonging to another world.
There trooped the dryads, there amid the leaves,
Quivering in sunlight, ribald satyrs peeped :
Thither, when hung in heaven the clear cold moon,
Light fays among the ferns and foxglove bells
Tripped to the music of the nightingale,
Holding high revel, till the stars would fade,
When wild rose fragrance stole abroad at dawn,
And night blushed red to meet the fair-browed morn.
There babbling echo, ever listening, lurked :
There Flora dwelt, with her right gallant train,
Her countless multitudes of subjects fair,

Robed in all hues to grace their lovelier queen,
Blowing their faint perfumes in fragrant clouds :
So here, in spring-time, troop the violet,
Fair flocks of innocent primroses, wind flowers,
As fair as frail, strong-scented hyacinths,
Blurring the sloping banks with purple haze,
A lower heaven of flowers, a nether sky,
Azure, adorned with snowy blossom clouds.

Here bursts the glad surprise of hawthorn bloom,
Sweetest of English flowers, with sweetest name
Of all the months, and with its speckled snow,
Scenting the genial air, when dewlap deep,
Golden in buttercups, the cattle stand,
And chirpings of young birds are in the hedge,
What time the petals of the wild rose drop,
And the neglected primrose withering dies :
When woodbine, or the modest virgin's bower
Mantles the hedge with unobtrusive bloom.
Or, where, when sultry June hushes the fields,
As if the spirit of the dewy dusk
Rises, with turreted bells, the foxglove's spire.
Here burn the berries of the mountain ash,
When autumn comes, and through its yellowing leaves
Gleam scarlet haws, the wild geranium still
Peeping among the fronds of sicklied fern,
And shining blackberries gaunt brambles deck.

The sanctuary of birds, the willow wren,
Thrush, woodlark, blackbird, fly for refuge here,
And unalarmed, flit in and out, and preen
Their wings, while warbling on the charmed air
Delicious melodies, till all the vale

Echoes with joy ; there, bright-eyed in the shade,
The mother bird sits brooding o'er her eggs,
Awatch for fire-eyed ferret, vicious stoat.

A gentle sound, well nigh inaudible,
Of waters trickling down the mossy bank,
Attracts the steps towards a natural fount.
Climbing the steep ascent, more slippery made
By weeping of the silvery water threads
'Mid pebbles, grass, and intercepting leaves,
The source is reached, the original well-head spring,
Fringed with fair drapery of graceful fern,
Depending from above, moss, ivy sprays,
And tufts of seedling grass. In front, the rock,
Broken, projects its bold entablature,
Roofing the grot where hides, dim seen, the wave.
No art that lavishes immortal thought,
Till from the dull stone rise nereids, and nymphs,
Dolphins, and tritons stout, blowing their conches,
Bedecks this fount with beauty. Ages since,
Forged on the anvil of a flaming world,
These old red rocks uprose : time since has stained,
Draped with fantastic moss, ferns, lichens grey,
The hoary crevices and sulphured chinks,
Where nature's latest nurslings cradled bloom.

A natural basin, scooped below, rough wrought,
Edged with green cress and moss, includes the wave,
Brighter than pearls, or than Bandusian fount,
Erst tinged by scarlet blood of votive kid.
The limpid drops distil, and through the rock
Hollowed above the fount, mantled with moss,
Weep silently, glisten among the leaves,

And dripping, tinkling, drop by drop, break through
The water's mesh of wavy light below.

Beneath the mimic sea, more clearly shown,
With every tremor of the tiny waves,
Twigs, pebbles, matted leaves, an acorn cup,
The hand of chance contingent here has strewn.

With liquid melody the new-born stream,
Cold as a cavern spring in mountain's heart,
Glides smoothly on through cress, through sedge, through weed,
Where lurks the lamprey, and where lies the loach,
Hour after hour all day still gurgling flows,
Through the green quiet of the slumbering woods,
The blessed silence of the hills and fields.

Here in the home of quietude and rest,
The world shut out, with its bewildering din,
Few sounds that tell of human life invade
The green walled silence, save when brings the wind
Chime from the village tower, or bird-boy's shout,
Whistle of ploughman from the furrowed slope,
Or later sounds of sickle or of scythe
From tedded hayfields or the red ripe corn.

IX

THE BLOWING OF THE CLOVER.

THE kindliness of nature never fails.
O fresh sweet summer breeze ! that with a sigh
Of infinite rest blows o'er these shining fields,
Breathes o'er the million clover-bolls that bow
Mute homage to your passing might, a voice
Comes in your echoes whispering soft to man

Of nature's virgin purity, her stores,
Odours nectarean, fragrances, perfumes,
Distilled through her alembics manifold,
The clean sweet freshness of the cowslipped fields,
Essence ambrosial of brief myriad lives,
Exhaled on every breeze, from orange groves,
Magnolia, tuberose, apple blossom, may,
Lilac, or jasmine, or from flowery beds,
Verbena, lavender, musk, heliotrope,
Lily, or violet, sweetbriar after rain,
Or dreaming rose ; tells of beneficence
That robes, in this bright hour, all things with gold.
Here, in the limitless heaven, the ample field
Of her vast kindliness, frail mortal man
Transfigured in the brightness of her love,
Seems lost like yon small bird that high o'erhead
Swims in the glorious flood of summer noon,
A speck, a particle, in the broad tide,
Lost quickly to the eye, yet whose sweet song,
In sunny quiet of the noontide hour,
Drops faintly from above. Lesson so great
Befits our earnest thought. For oft the fear
Darkens the mind that, when life's gloaming comes,
We too must sink from free, bright, vigorous life
To weakness, dull inaction, sick-room close,
Helpless dependence, prisonment and death ;
A dismal road ! Yet must I fondly hold
That nature's kindliness can never fail :
Taught not from words reiterated, faith
Instinctive, nor instinctive love for her,
Mother of mothers, nature, tenderest nurse,

Feelings befitting man ; nor sprung from fact
Alone, but by intelligence deduced,
Ripened affection. Though dark doubts obtrude,
Appalling fears, to this dear hope we cling,
That nature's kindness, like the sun's, still lives,
Though clouds obstruct, storms burst, night blots out all.

Yet can it be that nature is less kind
As years pass by, lavish with gifts to lure
The early travellers along life's path,
But failing her poor pensioners, when most
They need her kindliness ? Can this be so ?
Or, why should nature seem so kind in life,
And not in death ? Or, why embitter sore
The dreary dusty way that all must trudge ?
Is she not kind in death ? with mother's hand
Covering the troubled face, hushing the sobs,
Lulling to deeper slumber. Thus I mused ;
And the white clover poured its sweetness forth
Again upon the air, and brought withal
What seemed a sense of shame, gentle reproach,
That in this wondrous world the rational mind
Should in its secret thought demean itself,
Distrust mild nature, doubt her fostering care,
Should hesitating stand without this realm
A stranger, a mere alien, not a son :
Should pitifully glean from passing glance,
From trivial changes in the natural scene,
Of opening bud, sere leaf, or dropping flower,
Daybreak, or shifting shadows, dying eve,
And the sweet softness of the summer night,
The mighty laws that hedge life's destinies.

One with the flower or drifting winged seed,
 That balances on viewless stream of air,
 And yet not one, with wider range endowed
 Of reason, and the boundless field of hope ;
 The conscious elevation of the power,
 Awful, divine, that, pondering, rejects,
 And with full acquiescence and free choice
 Resolves on good. Yet not in vain, ye flowers,
 Sweet breathing, fresh, ye preach your voiceless gospel,
 And not in vain, ye sweet-voiced choristers,
 Your pure high strains that pierce these shadowy aisles ;
 Ye humble servitors in nature's fane,
 The glittering brook that sparkles 'mid the briers,
 Blossoms on thorny brakes, or plumes of grass,
 Fringed lichens of the corrugated oak,
 And all the myriad moving woodland leaves ;
 Not vain your influence, unconsciously
 Thrown forth, to lead the mind intelligent,
 That fain would know what nature means or wills,
 That seeks for union more intimate,
 Or, if that such a hope too daring seem,
 Offers submission to her stern decrees.

IX

THE GLEBE WOOD.

H EWN from red sandstone rock, wheel cut, and worn,
 Up to the hill-top climbs the straggling lane,
 Bordered with hedgerows, by the bill-hook clipped
 But rarely. Walnut, apple trees o'erhead
 Stretch from the rector's orchard generous boughs.

Through all the quiet day few passers by
Break on the silence of this slumber-land :
Save when the timber-wain slow labours past,
Till grind of wheels, hoof clinks, and teamster's voice
Die in the distance : then the ring-dove's coo
Sings to the babbling brook, muffled in leaves,
And lulls the world. Down this steep rutted road,
In early morn, when dew lies white on fern
And bramble spray, the bright-eyed squirrel steals
To prank and frisk among the heliotropes,
And calceolarias of the trim kept lawn ;
Or grunting badger trots beneath the hedge,
Bound for the garden strawberries. Wood pigeons,
Boldened by silence, haunt the hawthorn trees,
Leisurely busy with the berries crude.
Deep-anchored in the hedgerow, with its roots
Like cables strained across the bald red rock,
Grey-lichened, ivy-netted, towers the oak,
Stretching its rugged boughs with vigour rude
Above the matted plants that throng the bank,
Where lady's-bedstraw, ivy, scarlet leaves
Of wild geranium, or the bright red fruit
Of the wild strawberry, all tangled grow,
With creeping loosestrife, violets, cyclamen,
Deep-furrowed primrose leaves, their flowers long dead,
Warp of dog-roses, gay with white star bloom,
And weft of woodbine, or the clinging sprays
Of robin run i' the hedge, a fabric wove
In summer's magic loom by fairy hands.

Breaking the hedgerow's line a cave's recess
Scooped from the rock, with sulphur lichen stained,

Makes cool retreat, whence crawls with flickering tongue,
And jewelled eye, the warty newt, chill imp
Of nature, eager for the sun's bright kiss.
Where quaint unwholesome crowd of fungi pitch
Their orange crimson mimic tents, the hedge,
Waxing more vigorous, lusty brambles flings
To sway and wanton with the passing wind.

A broken gate, swung on a single hinge,
Access to pathway overgrown, weed-choked,
Feebly denies. This, in the years long past,
Led to a cottage, once a peasant's home,
On the wood's edge, deserted, desolate,
Deemed of no worth : yet once a human home,
Perchance with some old tale of sorrow linked.
Mouldering, abandoned now, yet sacredness
Broods round the whispering trees and lonely house,
Haply once cheerful with the varied sounds
Of human life ;—the children's shout at play ;
Patter of little feet on floor and stair ;
The pleasant voice of woman at her work ;
The mother's song, rocking the cradle bed ;
The father's plodding steps at shut of day ;
Bark of the friendly house-dog on his rounds ;
Cackling of poultry, and the hum of bees
Round the straw hives amid the raspberry canes.
Now ruined all ! silent, so deadly still,
With eyeless windows, door-way gaping wide,
Fright-struck in depths of utter vacancy.
A robin on the door-sill wistful sings ;
The swallow twitters still below the eaves ;
The starling in the smokeless chimney builds ;

The garden-beds lie waste, the flowers run wild,
Pansies foot deep, musk straggling o'er the path,
The porch rose brier bursts from its shreds of cloth ;
While on the broken roof of tiles have camped
Sungreen and stone-crop, mounds of yellow moss.

When lifts the tracery of the shelving boughs
Come glimpses of bright landscape far below,
With delicate tint of blue through all the air,
Woods, hills, hedged fields, and, glittering through the vale,
The silvery windings of the river's flow,
Calm in full summer beauty, over which
The sun's bright rays, softened by summer mist,
Spread like a glory. Here one well might dream,
With sounds as gentle as those heard in dreams.
The wind wakes but to sigh, then drops to rest.
The river brawls far off among its stones,
Scarce heard for all the wilderness of trees,
The bird's low twitter in green cloistered gloom,
Whispering of leaves, blend their sweet minstrelsy.

From the lorn precincts of the ruined cot
The glebe wood stretches to the hill's broad base,
All in the terrier writ with faded ink ;
Strange appanage ! reaching far centuries back,
Through all the wrecking and rough-handed past,
When some grim baron in his castle hold,
Parleying with death, mayhap, loosening his grip,
Refuge to take in shadow of good deeds,
Bequeathed these forest lands to Holy Church.
Saxon and Dane and Norman all have gone ;
With crested helmets, closed vizors, spears a-tilt,
Gone down their turbulent and bloody road,

While in its virgin freshness stands unchanged
This strip of ancient England. Ruins none,
Bastion, or donjon, ivied battlement,
Yet these broad oaks, with myriad gossiping leaves,
This rounded beech-tree's gray-green lichened trunk,
Where the small ivy closely clinging climbs,
And mosses creep, are living monuments.
When Agincourt and Crecy roused the land,
Alive with song, sunshot or dark with shade,
Then was this wood, as now, a temple fair :
Some of whose massive columns still remain,
Like ruined pillars some, that prostrate lie,
All velvet green, into whose rotten pith
The foot, too rashly planted, crackling sinks.

Here, through the past, the hunter plied his craft ;
Here once the blue-stained Briton, skin begirt,
Tracked bear, or boar, or wolf : its leafy tents
Sheltered the birds, the nomads of the sky ;
Here, 'neath the fir-tree's root, with mounds of earth
Scratched out, the badger delved, and spiders spun
Their shining threads across the cave's red mouth,
And turreted foxglove bells bedecked the bank.
At dusk and dawn twinkled the tails of rabbits,
Red deer roamed, wild oxen bellowing ranged,
The wild sow farrowed, and the grey wolf whelped.

Man comes ; man goes ; nature, in leisurely guise,
Forgetting her poor children's little day,
Mends their brief ravage, puts their playthings by,
Mayhap replacing them with nobler forms ;
With merciful construction gently shrouds
In her grand secret of forgetfulness,

Their works, their wounds, blots out their short-lived joys.
Nature renews her claim, nor heeds the past,
How sanctified by human joy or grief,
Holding the present, howe'er dark or bright,
Prelude and groundwork for oncoming years,
Moving in loops of sweeping centuries,
In cycles vast to gain her destined end :
Steadfast upon the future, resolute,
Our future too, our ampler field, though oft,
Dejectedly, we deem the past as all.

x

THE QUIET OF THE HILLS.

ABSOLUTE quiet ! perfect utter rest
Broods over all these broad and open hills ;
Depths beyond depths of peace in heaven's blue vault,
High in whose dome sublime yon feathery cloud,
Uplifted far above this stormy world,
Above the fitful currents of the wind,
By viewless hands aerial upborne,
So lightly balanced rests as if it slept.
But how can I with this rude pen bring in
The mighty quiet, and the absolute rest !
How breathe in these dead words the soul of peace
That makes a heaven upon these lonely hills :
How rob the sunlight of its living gold,
Filch from the pure exhilarating breeze
The secret power that strengthens while it calms.

Here seated high, the noises from the plain
Rise scarcely audible. Far off below,

The tiny horses and the tinier men
Creep slowly, noiselessly, across the fields
As in a dream : but, when the wind awakes,
Faint whistling through the bents and harebells near,
At times come ghosts of sounds far distant, thin,
Tinkling, diminished, like the pining song
Of dancing gnats, so small, as scarce to touch
The shore of audible sense ;—the bark of dog,
Soft pit of hoofs upon the far white road,
Or faint halloo : then silence falls again.

Absolute quiet ! perfect, utter rest
Broods over all these broad and tranquil downs !
Vast canopy, blue vault of air serene !
The amplitude of heaven is all our own,
An all protecting hovering tenderness,
That smiles and secret benediction gives.
The sun is on the hills : invisible
Warm breath of thymy odours floats abroad.
Here the bee-orchis blooms, the euphrasy,
Wild unconsidered nurslings of the downs,
Cowslip's grey velvet stems and freckled bells
Lurk in the moss and tufts of blossoming thyme.

Like to the breaking of the world's last grief
Upon some infinite shore of endless rest,
Now breathes the whisper of the hills again ;
Or as the huge earth sighed, with trouble moved,
Seeking a listening ear in which to pour
Some deep unhappy secret, ere it turned,
And to profoundest slumber dropped. No more
The storm remembered, when through airy depths
Gigantic forces clashed, and in the dark,

Wrestled fierce blasts, and passionate rains burst forth,
Drenching blind helpless earth, when from afar
Through midnight's world of darkness wildly rushed
Conflicting hosts of cloud battalions, charged
With heaven's dread thunder, wakening the roar
Of startled echoes rumbling through the vales.
All silent now, dead still. In dizzying heat
Faint chirrs the vaulting grasshopper, or now
Like the ecstatic rapture of a soul,
Ravished with tremulous joy. The clear pure song
Of skylark from the plain mounts higher and higher,
Sweeter and yet more clear. O darling songster !
Let our glad thoughts rise with thy quivering wings
Flying for sanctuary to the broad blue heavens !
Higher the minstrel soars, a tiny speck, till lost
In the effulgent splendour of high noon.

Alone, again alone : this jutting point,
This hill-top domed all round with dazzling blue,
Seems like a headland, whence the rational thought
Might gaze abroad. The breathing human life
Gathers its mystery : how strange to be,
And, in the secret cabinet of thought,
Resolve this varied universal world.
Resolve ? Nay, dream. Can other beings dream,
And reason thus ? This tiny burnished fly
Lighting upon the tilted succory bloom,
This lichen'd stone, that here mayhap hath lain
Unmoved for centuries, or these couching hills,
Or earth's vast globe a-swing with living freight,
Have these existence, thought intelligent,
To muse upon the mystery of themselves,

Some mode of thought, perhaps of consciousness ?

Here from this promontory thrust in space,
Outspreads the ocean of the azure depths,
Mysterious blue ! o'er which the wistful eye
Wanders far forth, or wondering pensive rests :
Ocean of ether, boundless, fathomless,
Like to Ygdrasil famed in Scaldic lore,
Pervading and uniting all, earth, heaven,
The living and the dead, whose restless waves,
Speeding with swiftness inconceivable,
Charged with what meanings manifold, break at
The throne of God : perchance the hyaline,
The sea of glass seen in the apocalypse,
Where stand in purity the white-robed throng.

Again the wind sweeps past, and hither brings
Tribute to thought. Emerged from silence comes,
Velvety soft, the rumble of a train,
Subdued by distance to faint puffs of sound,
That come and go upon the fitful breeze,
Louder, like sound of distant waterfall,
Till now the eye discovers on the plain,
Far off among the woods, white trail of steam,
And with the level and discordant sound
Rushes the thought of man's harsh noisy world.
The roar of commerce, and the clang of work,
Whirring of wheels and looms, the hammer's din,
All now foreshortened, and to this slight sound
Reduced. Distance and her twin sister time
Diminish greatness ; in the vault of air
Alike the sweetest and the harshest sounds
Are dropped. Our fret, our discontent, our toil,

Subjects now greatest to possess the eye,
And overfill the heart, will vanish soon,
Their echoes in the increasing distance lost.

Avaunt ! intruding sounds—ye have your hour,
And justly challenge our full earnestness,
Summoning the strenuous and o'erleaping will.
Now is the sabbath of the summer noon.
Give but brief respite, let the tired heart
Slake its deep thirst, bathe in the brimming tide,
The golden flood of heaven's own restfulness.

O fresh reviving air ! unblurred by smoke,
That brooding loiters o'er these thymy swells,
These broadly sweeping downs with gentle breath,
O crisp life-giving wind ! that purely blows,
Bringing for nostrils keen, expanded wide,
Large draughts of pure exhilarating life,
Whence come ye ? From the cobalt dome above,
Or from far southern lands, from distant leagues
Of cool blue summer seas, that placid sway
'Neath purpled skies, and dying distant clouds ?

Closing the eyes amid the summer peace,
The musing thought is drowned in reverie,
Oblivious in the drowsy warmth, of past
Or future. From the fields below, the sound
Of bird-boy's gun cracks forth, and clamouring rise
A cloud of rooks, circling on shining wing,
And floating high aloft, till at some sign,
They sweep from view. Again dead silence falls,
Till the faint tinkling of the sheep-bell comes
From rambling flock. Hard by rise grassy mounds,
Ramparts of hill-fort, strong in bygone days,

Where scattered near browse silent clambering sheep.
 With the dull clinking of their leader's bell,
 The shifting feet, or shuffling in the grass,
 Come thoughts of other days, far other sounds,
 When this calm landscape, these green rounded hills
 Echoed with fearful cries, when, from the plain,
 The battle-shock was heard, yells of defiance,
 Clashing of shields, and the fierce war-horn's blare,
 With shrieks of pain, shouts, execrations dire.
 All ended now! Hushed is the bitterest strife,
 Its ravage hidden, its wild wounds all healed.
 Mild nature buries in her gentleness,
 In dreamy silence, of the quivering noon,
 'Mid the deep quiet of these solemn hills,
 Her griefs beneath this daisy brodered pall.

XII

NATURA MEDICATRIX.

SMELL of the fresh-turned earth delved by the plough,
 Or resinous fragrance of green-tasselled larch,
 Breath from the dripping dulse on wave-swept rocks,
 Warm feel of growth in April's clear stemmed woods,
 When the first primrose opens, violets blow,
 The piercing sweetness of the clover crofts,
 Salubrious waftings of the salt sea breeze,
 How grateful to the sense! What lore is here,
 Suggestions of some friendly thoughtfulness,
 Of kind prevision, merciful intent,
 Some inward pitifulness and sympathy,
 Gentle benignity of nature's soul,

The obscure but patient tenderness that soothes
Life's sharpest pangs : foreknows contingency,
Against mischance, blow of fell spite provides,
What compensations manifold, for loss,
For sore abrasions of this sharp edged life,
Depressed vitality, the angriness
Of chafed embittered souls. Here, in the porch
Of her most gracious sanctuary, but a pace
From this loud brawling world removed, she stands
With healing lymph, with anodyne of sleep,
Or merciful cloud of blank unconsciousness,
With which to wrap the shrinking fearful mind
That from the sounding gloom starts back dismayed,
Dreading the dissipation of life's powers.

But to the ills that rise from man's rough world,
The hurry, and the fever, and the fret,
Unnatural conventionalities
That rob the soul of hope, exhaust the strength,
Wring the last drop of living interest,
Chiefly she ministers. There are who yearn,
Deep hungering for the green of fields and woods,
Oft longing, 'mid the rush of jostling cares,
Exactions countless of a busy life,
To fly for refuge from the city's din,
Roar of the peopled streets, life's restless tides,
Ambition, pleasure, passion, the dire drought
Of avarice, parched as the throat of hell ;
From dreary commonness, that with its flood
O'erwhelms the early lingering memories
Of nature's silent winsome loveliness
Fondly enshrined ; to gain a respite sweet,

When for brief space the prisoner is free.

No hermit in the blinding torrid sands
 E'er welcomed in his ecstasy the dreams
 That filled the precincts of his rocky cell
 With a celestial all transfiguring joy ;
 Nor lover seized with fonder eagerness
 The hour when he again should hear the voice,
 Should look upon the face he fondly loved,
 Than one, who, long immured in stifling streets,
 Flies the polluted air, the murky reek
 That blots the beauty of the sun and stars ;
 Escapes for sanctuary to the silent world
 Where nature rules, to know her peace divine,
 Drift with the leisureliness of natural things,
 Till the lost sense of childhood come again,
 Simplicity, and innocence, and peace.

Cunning thy hand, O gracious one, to heal ;
 Swift is thy help ; and in thy secret stores
 Balsams hast thou and cordials, anodynes,
 Tonics, elixirs, stored in every wind
 That blows o'er blossoming fields, o'er furrowed seas,
 Dark purple tumbling waves whose glassy sides,
 Upcurving, smooth, rise to their snow-fringed crests,
 Where the slant sea-gull sweeps near hissing foam,
 Or stormy petrel scuds across the gale,
 The pleasant darkness of thick-branching woods,
 The glorious open downs swept by fresh winds,
 Blue heathery hills, or gorse-emblazoned moors,
 High shadowed moors far stretched beneath the clouds,
 With gleam of water-pools, or where aloft
 Storm-splintered fiery pines, with beckoning arms,

Hold their hoarse conference : true remedies
Most potent for the hurt o'erwearied mind,
Administered so swiftly that relief
Comes ere the tide of health begins to flow.

O mighty mother of unnumbered lives,
Thine is a mother's voice, a mother's hand,
Like the cool hand laid on the fevered brow,
Lulling the restlessness of sensitive minds !
Though to inaction deep thou dost awhile
The sensitive powers of rational life entrust,
Labour for man is thy great ordinance,
Most salutary spring of cheerfulness,
Fountain of hope, strength-bringer, doubly armed
To recompense with wealth of energy
The diligent mind, imparting to the will
Fuller command o'er all its tribute powers ;
To rob the anguished eye of haggard light,
To smooth the plaited brow of puzzled care,
Lure tenderly the grieving soul to rest,
Finding forgetfulness in nature's peace.
To bland delightful sleep, thy patient nurse,
Dost thou entrust thy wounded ones ; whose hands
Refill the vessels of fast ebbing powers,
Restore, invigorate, and cover deep
In an oblivion brief the brier-torn soul.
Thine the bright sunshine, glorious, beautiful,
Light as an angel's footfall 'mid the flowers,
That makes the world rejoice, that quickens life,
Bathing in golden flood all things that are,
Kindling yet brighter lustre in the eye,
Tanning the brow, and reddening the fresh cheek

With full and glorious life. Not more the flowers
That on warm southern bank wake from their tomb
And wintry sepulchre to hail the sun,
Bask in his quickening rays, grow in his light,
Than man oppressed by toil or driven by care
Revels in thy bright flood. With nature dwells
A tender pitifulness for human grief,
That sighs away the hours of hollow night :
She with soft fingers frees the sorrowing thoughts
From the dread trouble that with merciless fang
Has fastened on the soul : hides but to heal,
Lulls and engrosses the afflicted mind,
Levels the grave, and fills with golden moss
The sharp cut epitaph of sorrowing love :
Slowly, with cunning fingers, that bind up
Most grievous wounds, gives the worn sufferer ease,
Then, by the merciful framing of the soul,
Familiar grown with rough adversity,
The stricken mind takes vantage of affliction,
Redeems with holiest thoughts dull work-day hours,
Finds through their gray events a clue of gold,
And from life's stumbling blocks occasion takes
To build a stairway to the heights of heaven.

XIII

THE IDYLL OF THE RIVER.

A GAIN i' the fields, dear open fields that smile
Responsive to the pleasant smile of heaven.
Here we may largely breathe, wandering at will
Where the cloud shadows wander, and the wind,

Strays by the wandering river's tree-fringed bank.

Thin buzz of flies, soft breathing of the wind
That living dies again, yet brings the chirp
And hasty whirl of wing of passing bird.
Gurgle of water-tones in liquid flow,
Beneath the hawthorn shade, and, fainter still,
The far off crowing of a farm-yard cock,
Stroke of woodcutter's axe with measured blows,
Softened by distance till scarce audible,
These break the silence of a golden hour,
Then melt into the gentleness of dreams.

The falling stream, shrunk by the summer heat,
Has left small islets, ringed with banks of mud,
Pitted by cattle hoofs. Here o'er the runlets,
The smooth by-water pools, the dragon fly
Hovers on gauzy wings, invisible,
Till the sun smites their splendid glittering hues ;
Or gaily painted moth, on sidelong drift,
Feeble and flickering, flutters aimless round,
Then stoops to sip the glassy sun-tipped wave.
A herd of browsing kine upon the bank,
Full dewlap deep in grass and buttercups,
Attentive, mute, watch with slow curious gaze
Th' intruder. The broad-headed lazy bull,
Dull-eyed, curling his tail upon his back,
And throwing up his fly-bepestered head,
Slow rising from the sward, stretches his flanks,
Contemptuous turns, then slowly moves away.
Deep in the alders' shade some cattle hide,
With pliant tongues from the o'erhanging bank,
At times lick mouthfuls of the lush green grass,

Crunching the juicy morsels, or lie down,
Their eyes half-closed, and, dreaming, chew the cud :
Some wading half-leg deep a yard from shore,
Lower their broad square mouths to drink their fill,
Or, splashing the brown water, snuffling turn
To lick their rough brown sides. A heifer stands
Out in the current of the gurgling stream,
That flows with gentle ripples round its shanks,
Picture complete of absolute content.

Cool river airs blow off with odours faint
Of chamomile and water-mint in flower,
Creamy plumed meadow-sweet, or virgin's bower.
Eddied or oily smooth, with circle made
By dipping gnat or water spider's jump,
Where ring or dimple shows the feeding trout,
Or where a hawking swallow dips, or fish
Leaps with curved tail in air, then drops again,
Launching small foam bells on their voyage brief.
Smooth glides the river to its calm dark pools
Of dusky blue, and, as in mirror clear,
Reflects the steadfast quiet of the sky.

The streaming tresses of the water weeds
Sway 'mid the silver threads ; near shore,
Veronica and brooklime crowd the bank ;
Hawthorns and hazels on the farther slope,
All intertwined with straggling blackberry briers,
Dog roses fanged with thorns, and reddening hips,
Looped with loose ladder vines of clematis,
Cover the slope. A fleet of foraging ducks,
In noisy colloquy, with yellow bills
Fish neck deep down. The water hen slips out

From the blue haze of rush and bladed sedge.

Now the low murmur of the drowsy noon
Falls to a deeper hush. The sweeping wind
Drops its light freightage, bird songs, low of kine,
Till soft faint water lapse alone is heard,
A querulous murmur where the moving reeds
Down-pointing, dip their slender tremulous lines
Feeling the current, for a while submerged,
Then to the surface swinging. Clouds of gnats
Play ceaselessly above the reaches smooth,
Where lie reflected all the bankside flowers,
Mallows, or tansy, or red seeding dock.
The harsh-voiced coot from out the chattering flags
Answers its mate. The king-fisher darts forth
From nest with fish-bones lined in tunnelled bank,
A momentary streak of dazzling blue,
Skimming the stream, then straight is lost to view.

Upon the isle where shivering willows droop
Their pallid leaves upturned in every wind
That moves the alders, squats the water-rat,
Nibbling the juicy sedge. On flows the stream,
'Mid surly hush of trees in the hot noon,
Ruffled, or blue, with its white pictured clouds,
Babbling, or gurgling, murmuring plaintively
O'er pebbly reach, 'neath darkly bowering shade,
As though it sought for rest. Now through the fields
Beneath the open sky, the broadening flood
Sweeps round, past where the patient horses stand,
With working ears, and ever switching tails.
Here, in the silent days of burning June,
The dusty raddled flock are driven, and soon

Clapping of shears, and bleatings loud or low,
And shoutings from the struggling shearers come.

Hard by, a rustic bridge bestrides the brook,
Neighbouring a lonely wood, where clattering jays
Usurp the silence. Loitering here awhile
The lingering eye searches the glassy pools
Formed by the current swirling round the piers,
Dusk pools wherein like phantoms, glide, scarce seen,—
Though casting shadows on the sandy floor,—
The lusty trout. To the road's grassy ruts
A chaffinch flies, picks at some scattered straws,
Or feathery oats, flits to the gate's top rail,
Hovers, drifts sidelong off upon the wind.

The wistful eye roams where the streamlet runs,
Till lost to view among the woods and hills,
Shadowy, far off, that, opening, yield it way
To the vast ocean : and a sigh escapes,
To think of yet another stream, whose course
Is all unknown. The shadow of a cloud
Darkens the passing moment as it flies.

XIV

CLEAR SHINING.

COME, O care-burdened heart, harried and spent
With life's vexations, and the ceaseless fight ;
Come breathe the air, come revel in the peace
Of sunny fields, broad hills, and quiet woods,
With green sequestered nooks where reverie dwells.
Forget the past, as nature has forgot
On this bright summer morn. The moveless clouds

Serenely anchored in heaven's glorious blue,
Retain no mark of winter's racket, storms
That shook the groundsil, made the chimneys howl,
Muffling the window panes with frost-edged drift,
Of savage gales, black nights, and cheerless days.
The frolicsome wind, that makes the oak's vast breadth
Of red green leaves to titter as it goes,
Has all the merciless frantic rage forgot,
That cracked its crooked branches, waked the woods
To surge with grief inanimate, to moan
In fretful worry and unrest, all day,
All night, with roar like ocean's agony ;
Now to meek whisper dropped, or casual sigh :
The yellowing corn goldening both hill and plain
With scarlet fire of poppies all a-dance,
Tells not of dripping, dark, November days,
When the keen ploughshare cleft the stubbly ground.
Nature has had her storms as thou thy griefs,
Yet burying all her dead, she girds her loins,
Sweeps clear with wind of brisk activity,
The stage for the bright present, and for days
Brighter to be, on all the pleasant cares
Of living fully bent. Peaceful and bright,
Pure joy of being rules the sunshine hour.

The subtle spirit of the clear fresh morn,
Flutter of leaves, and drowsy sweep of wind,
With laughing sound of waters 'mid the trees,
All the fair beauty of this breathing world,
Have magic power. Now on the topmost bar
Of lichened woodland gate perches the robin,
Eyes his small world, then pours smooth easy tune :

Singing in silence for the joy of song.
Sing on, O bird! sing to these listening woods,
Warble your ditty, whose pure liquid strains
Proclaim life sweet, pleasant the boundless air,
The happy sky, green woods, fresh passing wind,
And sweet the love that makes thy ruddy breast
Ruffle and throb with pulsings of sweet song.

The dusky woodland aisles in bluish mist
Recede far off, columned with ivied stems.
Whither away, O journeying butterfly?
Feeble and rocketing upon the wind,
A frail irresolute thing, balanced above
The ripples of these silken meadow waves.
A fluttering blossom on the wind thou seem'st,
Feeblest and frailest, yet in this rough world
Thou hast thy station set, and nature's hand
Defends thee well, here in this sunny hour
Brings thee to feast at life's high banqueting.
Creatures most fragile bid the heart confide
In nature's kindness, her sheltering care,
Who owns for hers the meanest thing that lives.
Slow and deliberate in her processes,
Her ends concealed, oft dimly understood,
Nature deals kindly with the trustful heart.

Ah me! how brief, how empty seems our life!
Man's energy sweeps upward like the wave,
Breaks into foam, then falls to nothingness.
Gain incommensurate, life's objects reached
Too late, or with sore bitterness commingled,
Peril, and fear, drudging through life's lone road,
Infinity of effort, slight reward,

Through fret, uncertainty, through hindrances
Unnumbered, threatening clouds and sunny gleams,
Evening comes on, draws round its dusky shades,
The end is reached ; our life's brief tale all told.

Refulgent summer with green drapery
Of woods, blue distance, tawny breadths of grain,
Whispers beneficence, prevision, care.
The sunshine wheels about the oak's vast mound,
Piercing the dim recesses of its shade,
As if it searched the unsunned depths to bless.
Through the green lattice of the beechen boughs
Rich yellow gold of ripening harvest fields
Shines like a flame. Silently bountiful
Nature accomplishes her ends diverse,
In all her gifts uplifting with glad hope
The mind, else apprehensive, with the trust
That 'neath the commonness of daily life
Large purposes are being evolved, nor counts
Man's happiness a spark that needs must die.

Afraid of nature ? Smitten with distrust
Why cowering steal through life, or furtive hide,
Hearing eternal whispers through the dark :
Why deem her inconsiderate or cold,
Listening to note, in her revenges swift,
Unsparring, passionate, forgetful, hard ;
While, in the mighty movement of her way,
Rigid machinery, the single life
She counts as nought, less than the withered leaf,
Or grain of drifted sand on ocean's shore,
Or mote that dances in the summer beam ?

O trembling heart ! an unseen power surrounds

Thy being frail, perchance unknown to thee.
 Parent of parents, love's essential fount,
 This nature, in whose arms since infancy
 Thou 'st lain, although mayhap no answering love
 Has smiled its recognition, guards thy life :
 No passionless observer of thy fate,
 But sternly vigilant and shrewdly wise,
 Rich compensations manifold she brings,
 Leading still onward through dim paths undreamed.

Wear on, O golden day, with chirp and buzz,
 And shifting shadows ! From the yellow fields,
 Breast high, where reapers bend, come happy shouts,
 The sickle rushes through the red ripe corn.
 Thought has its harvesting, its precious sheaves,
 Its secret sweetness, honey sweeter far
 Than filched from flowers by dusty-headed bees.
 Here, as the clusters of the ripening fruit
 Lurk bunched amid the yellowing leaves, what time
 The brambles stop the path, so 'mid the change,
 Endless succession of these natural scenes,
 Hide priceless truths to enrich our lingering thoughts ;
 Our winter store against life's shortening days.

xv

WHISPERING OF LEAVES.

ALL hushed, all hazy is the quivering noon,
 Odorous with fragrance of white clover bloom,
 While the warm summer air is filled with hum
 Of happy life. Flies in the sunbeam dance ;
 A filmy veil of blue hangs o'er the land.

The woods are still. The charcoal burner's smoke
Lightly diffused, drifts slowly through the trees.
The echo of the woodman's axe falls dulled.
A dragon fly shoots past on lustrous wings,
And buzzing steel blue flies swing to and fro.
Orange and black, a portly humble bee,
Bright-hued, booms within range, passing to silence.
A yellow-hammer on the woodland path,
Hops, looks around, then flits into the hedge.
The sounds of early August meet the ear :
The harvest wagon creaks, high piled with sheaves,
Rumbling away with soft and velvet sound :
Then out of silence comes the crack of whip,
Or teamster's shout, and all again grows still.

Now dries the morning dew from off the grass,
And in the purple gloom beneath the elms,
The cattle doze i' the shade. Through the low boughs
When faints the air in dazzling noon-tide heat,
Come quiet glimpses of rich harvest fields,
Where dots of white among the golden brown
Show reapers at their work ; or stubble fields,
Left to the scattered gleaners, all a-bent.
Upon the air light floating thistledown
Scarce visible against the blue, sails past,
Else poised, with drift nigh imperceptible.

An ancient oak here throws its lusty arms
Abroad, deep foliaged, with its ample shade,
Refreshing, cool, in noonday's blinding glare :
Within whose lichen'd corrugated trunk
The sap has pulsed for twice four hundred years,
Its history fully chronicled in branch,

Slant of the trunk, rough bark and rugged bough,
Canker and boss, lopped limbs, and weeping scars,
And broad circumference. Whence came the seed,
The tiny acorn dropped some far off day,
Eight centuries since? Perchance some Saxon child
Who hither strayed across the autumnal meads,
Dropped it in play; or, shaken by the storm
That raged in fury through the oaken woods,
Torn from its gray progenitor 'twas cast,
And trampled in the muddy ground by swine,
When called by swineherd's horn at shut of day :
There buried, till at call of the first spring,
Two tiny leaves unfolded. Its frail life
Was to the mercy left of weakest things,
Menaced by puny foes, the squeaking mouse,
Or vaulting grasshopper; till growing fair
The sapling spread aloft its praying hands
For golden alms of the all generous sun.
The hoof of browsing steer, the muffled paw
Of skulking wolf, wild cat, or stealthy fox
Prowling at night came near, or grunting boar,
Or rooting snout of gaunt and hungry swine.

Thus its first summer passed, and winter came,
Savage with sleety storm and bitter frost ;
Till soft spring rains, and summer's fervid glow,
Autumn's rough winds, and winter's muffling snows
Light airs, and kindly dews, all powers conjoined
To give the nursling strength. Thus it arose,
And threw strong arms above the velvet sward,
While underground its knotted spreading roots
Grasped firmer anchorage. Time wrought at length

Leaves, branches, rough mosaic of its trunk.
Birds nested there, and through its green arcades
Flitted with chirp and song. The squirrel bold
Frisked gaily down the highways of its boughs.
Here too, the owl, his feathers all a-blown,
With eyes like coals of fire, oft hissed, or when
The broad bright moon looked through the columned pines
Ghostly and still, hooted his dismal stave.

Thus through the slow-paced centuries it grew,
Broadening its girth, deepening its mighty roots.
Storms battered it, rains deluged, winter's frost
Cracked its rough-rinded stem, the summer's sun
Parched its broad world of leaves: the lightning smote
Its sturdy pride. Yet through all strife and change,
While emerald spring, dropping its sweet fresh flowers,
Passed singing through the woods upon its way,
Now bathed in depths of midnight's endless peace,
Now basking in the glare of August noon,
Or when October, all in brown and gold,
Veiled with light mists the autumn's dying days,
Grew the vast fabric to maturity.

O gentle breath of noon ! wake from these tongues
Of gossiping leaves their secrets of the past !
Children with golden hair have played anear,
Foot deep in daisies and fresh smelling grass,
What time the cuckoo shouted through the leaves ;
Or whispering lovers stood beneath the shade,
In mellow haze of summer's golden dusk,
Lost in their happiness. Here, when the sun
Poured his full noontide flood of quivering rays
The sunburnt mowers snatched their slumber brief

Stretched 'neath its boughs ; or poachers in the dark
 Whispered their stratagems, when, through the fern
 Rustled the fox, or stealthy weasel stirred,
 Or from the pines, or woody low-branched elms,
 The night-jar screamed, and the cock-pheasant crew.

Eight centuries of slow-revolving years !
 A vast expanse in human chronicles,
 Lifetime of nations. Fading like the grass,
 That year by year flashed its bright billows, died
 Man's generations ; yet the oak has lived,
 Leafed and unleafed, spread forth protecting arms,
 The many masters of these lawns survived,
 Stood firm through wreck of dynasties and thrones.

Light wisps of hay caught by its outmost twigs
 From lumbering wain, stir in the passing breeze.

xvi

WILD BLOOM.

GARDENING at will in their sweet negligence,
 What here the casual gossiping winds have sown,
 Of blossom, airy seed, borne on light wings,
 Ringed bine, tossed as with playful soft caress,
 Clasper or bramble on their trellis rude,
 Lies spread. Hither the dawn and dusk have come,
 Vested in gold, and with rich largesse decked
 Each topmost spray, each trembling leaf, with dew,
 Filling the chalice of the upturned flower
 With heaven's own nectar, charged with quickening life.
 The languid sun of silent quivering noon
 Leaning for very love his fervid beams,

Has trailed long drifts of breathing bloom abroad,
Fair clematis or honeysuckle bine.
Here shoot in lusty life clasper and branch,
And proudly flourished plume, tendril or leaf,
Or wanton spray flung high aloft in air,
That loving lies against a heaven of blue,
Moved by the selfsame wind that moves the clouds,
Fluttering the hedgerow's crowd of bickering leaves,
And fills the woodlands with their soft low roar.

O beautiful and peaceful world ! how bright,
How fresh ! as 'twere some Eden new create,
Not man's poor shadowed home of toil and grief.
All things rejoice : nor may the churlish heart
Wrapped in dull moodiness, refuse to launch
On the bright flood of universal joy.

The hedgerow, living rampart of the fields,
Shelters all flowers that in due season blow.
Winter relaxed of its grim frosty mood,
What time the warm south-west, with spitting rain,
Blows the slant rooks about the ashen sky,
New life bestirs itself on sunny banks,
Among white-rooted green of sprouting grass,
Or, at the hedge-foot, by the muddy road,
Where groundsel blossoms, and dead nettle blooms :
Or when the soft March day, with breeze that scarce
Ruffles the feathers on a linnet's breast,
Whispers that winter's past, the sparrows chirp,
Geese cackle loudly on the village green ;
The primrose opens its rough crumpled leaves,
And blossoms all of innocent surprise,
Wild violets come, and frail anemones,

Shy visitants, into a bleak rough world,
Ere the wake-robin peeping from its spathe,
Its niche of arrow-headed spotted leaves,
Quaint hooded prophet tells the spring at hand.
The crow of cock rings from the elm-girt farm,
Where on the hillside the slow-labouring plough
By two white horses drawn, whisking their tails,
Cleaves its bright ridges, or the harrow flings
Its dust aloft like smoke upon the wind.
The rippling music of the lark i' the sky
Enchants the stillness, making yet more sweet
The gentle breathing of the bland spring day,
That sense of freshness brings, recovered joy
Of earlier years, tingling through all the blood.

Scarce have been heard the bleating of the lambs,
When in the orchards dance the daffodils,
And shining yellow buttercups troop forth,
And cowslips shake their orange speckled bells.
Days of soft love woo forth the lurking life,
When reddening cherries ripen in the leaves,
Blossom of apple trees, lush growing grass
Smell sweet and fresh, and all the world is young,
Robed gorgeously in samite of white may,
The hedgerow stands ; clustering on every bough,
Or mantling all the hedge's roof of thorns,
The fresh-blown speckled bloom, creamy and rich,
With nutty perfume scents the neighbouring air.
This for sweet May. Red sorrel waves its plumes,
And shepherd's clocks dot white the mowing grass,
Wild pigeons coo among the oak's red buds,
Ere yet the black buds of the ash unfold.

And blossoms of white clover bless the world,
The dog-rose flagging in the noontide heat
Strays with its delicate perfumed petals light,
Pale salmon or faint pink with yellow crown.
When evening's crimson dusk brings evening's dew,
The piercing scent of sweetbrier on the air
In wafts, proclaims where lurks the eglantine.
There too the disregarded bramble blooms
In straggling freedom, binding the loose hedge
With thorny clasp, a sturdy-natured thing
That holds its leaves, plucked at by wintry storms.

Among the lowly intermingling bush
Rise through the close-pleached hedge high pillared elms,
Irregular, with corrugated bark,
All lichen-stained, orange or ashen gray.
Ivy with smooth and glossy leaves here climbs,
Mounting to reach the broad uncumbered sky.
Stage above stage of welcome purple gloom,
Windowed aloft with peeps of dazzling blue,
Lead to the ragged summit of dark leaves.
When the noon sunshine, blazing fierce and white
Over the heat-cleft meadows, make the sound
Of the cool gurgling brook amongst its stones
Most welcome music, in the elm tree's shade,
Contented in their dusky drowsy world,
The panting sheep or dozing cattle lie.

Here glistening holly spiked on every leaf,
Sturdy in pride, where by the bill-hook spared,
Shoots upward with its storm-defying thorns,
Decked with fair woodbine, which like some fond love,
Finding its way to the dark bushy heart,

Picks dainty course betwixt the prickly leaves,
Climbs to the crown, and clings round branch and stem ;
Here, too, thick hazel bushes with rough leaves,
Serrated, downy, weave their foliage dense,
Where broods in secrecy the nested finch,
And in due season catkins hang, or bunched
And milky nuts, when golden autumn comes.

The days go by, hot, brooding summer days,
Through gaps amid the trees, o'er many a hedge
And lichened five-barred gate, gleam barley shocks,
Or oat-sheaves gilded by the evening sun.
The flaunting poppy flies its scarlet flag :
The clematis trails forth its silky tufts :
Here pink-flushed bindweed hangs her delicate bells,
Crowding amid the leaves towards the sun :
Restharrow wanders through the blossoming thyme ;
Bright yellow toad-flax shines upon the bank :
Knapweed and scabious, nodding bugloss bloom,
What time the cranesbill's leaves grow vivid red.
Hither come glittering flies and surly wasps,
And on the umbel of the hemlock bloom
Find a broad plain. The dragon-fly steers past,
All green and gold with wings invisible,
A glorious creature, armed and edged with light ;
That coursing up and down, poises awhile,
Held moveless by a flower. Field crickets chirp,
Dizzily shrill, in the red clover breadths.
With push and crush among the loftier trees
The wandering ever whispering wind sweeps past,
Wakening a silken hush in beechen woods,
A rustling rain of restless poplar leaves,

Or sullen roar among the dark branched firs.

The speedwell with its mild and innocent gaze
Looks up into the broad expanse of sky,
With absolute possession of itself,
As though it held time present in its right,
Blue heaven its canopy, the world its throne.
Frail floweret, all at mercy of a breath !
Now will I look into thine eye, sweet flower.
Tell us the mystery of thy fair pure life.
Are other lives so interlocked with thine
That separation multiplies grim death ?
That change abrupt, a change to which thou yield'st
Thyself submissively, and in the void
Unmurmuring thy distinctive being dropp'st ?

Crowding the hedgerow's rank o'ertangled growth
Here every particle thrusts forth its life,
Struggles to blossom in a fragrant youth,
With transient beauty blesses this great world,
Dying, then leaves its treasured life in seed.

XVII

AMONG THE DOWN FERN.

THE sandy slope, climbed but with leisurely steps,
Knee-deep in bracken, while the summer wind
Fans the hot brow, a speckless blue o'erhead,
Leads upward to the broad, far-sweeping down,
Where prickly furze clumps crackle in the sun.
Sparse tufts of grass grow in the tawny sand.
Gnarled mossy oak roots crawl athwart the path,
Like serpents. Breathless noon has passed ; all clear

The blue hour's light: the noonday shadows sleep.
 Goldfinches hovering peck at thistledown;
 The journeying magpie quits the woodland oaks;
 Turmoil of bees among the heather bloom,
 Gathering their honeyed gold 'gainst wintry hours.
 People the sunny air with murmurous hum;
 The ragged camomile's fringed yellow discs
 And rays down-pointing scent the roadside air
 With their faint acid smell. Beyond, the eye
 Catches through sprays of red-stemmed blackberry thorns
 With worn rough leaves, the mounded oaken woods
 That from the hills sweep downward to the plain.
 There, through the fern, slopes the soft sandy lane,
 And through the gateway of descending trees
 A sweet blue landscape spreads for miles around.
 Patches of corn now for the sickle ripe,
 Farmsteads, and cottage homes with curling smoke,
 Where apples show upon the garden trees,
 And sunflower discs look o'er the garden hedge,
 Homelands and meads, hills, dimly thickening woods,
 In purple distance mingle with the clouds:
 In heavenly silence bathed, profound repose;
 Calm, utter calm, a moveless pictured world!

On either hand, nearer or more removed,
 Rise hawthorn bushes, stripped long since of bloom.
 The limping linnet lilting overhead
 Is here and gone. An orange velvet bee
 Swinging below a blossoming heather spray
 Now frees itself, and on straight steering wing
 Flies to the neighbouring bank, to lose itself
 Deep in the purple foxglove's heart. The fern

Laughs when the wind whispers its secret low,
And all the gossiping heather blossoms nod.
Trouble is on the grey green oaken woods,
That waked from slumber sigh o'er secret grief.
The hazels whiten with their leaves upblown ;
The wearied ash its pallid foliage lifts,
Frets in the breeze like some poor restless mind.

Here, all around, a world in miniature
Spends its brief days. An ant hill is hard by,
And the red ants in all directions run,
Some mount the higher grass blades, wave aloft,
As if in anger, their antennæ frail :
Some, bearing burdens, bravely struggle on,
Missing their path, as in this larger world
Of busy man, full oft. A fern's wide frond
Shelters their mimic capital from sun
Or rain, whilst, next the wind, a purple blaze
Of heather clump in bloom, seems forest vast,
Like those which, centuries since in this rough isle,
Kept savage tribes asunder. Yet, to these
Small emmets the great natural powers discharge
Like functions as to creatures bulkier made.
The sun climbs heaven's blue path, black vested night
Blots out their tiny doings for a while ;
The wind sweeps past with brisk salubrious breath ;
The freshening dew beneath night's canopy
Brings forth pellucid nectar, tips each spore
Of velvet moss, grass blade, or budding point
Of heather bloom, with liquid gems, as freely
As it affuses the vast sighing woods.
Perchance care finds in this small world a place.

The shining headed bee marauding stirs
 Rough tempest with its wings, or fiery wasp,
 With sullen menacing drone, invades their land,
 Or blundering beetle booms in velvet dusk,
 When the moist glowworm lights her gold-green lamp.
 Mayhap the darkness brings fresh enemies,
 Should the cold blindworm crawl about their realm,
 Gray spinners arming throng the blades of grass,
 Or staring horned snails smear slimy tracks,
 Streams of disaster for their commonwealth ;
 Or frisking rabbit of the evening's dusk
 Tear with rough claws their burrowed citadel ;
 Cold empty winds that creep about the fields
 Bring casual drift of rain, whose hapless slant
 May drown them with a deluge in few drops.

The crooked straggling gorse with spiky shade
 Folds their small capital within its arms.

XVIII

THE IDYLL OF THE DUSK.

SUFFUSED with crimson haze the western sky
 Burns deepening down, to purple lake, betwixt
 The gateway of the hills, a crystal flood,
 O'erhead, a moving mellow radiant sea,
 Pulsating upward to the purpling breadth
 Of the oncoming night. Clouds are there none,
 In all the broad expanse of quiet heaven,
 Save such as float in absolute repose,
 Level, serene, prolonged at either end,
 Swimming in gold and amber, tinged blood-red.

Dusk falls upon the distant quiet hills,
Vaporous and blue, and with its peaceful flood
Softly o'erwhelms a tired outwearied world ;
Dusk blurs the landscape ; dusk on cornfields brown,
Settling on tented stucks, on half-formed ricks ;
Dusk on the village and its rich brown roofs ;
On cottage doorways where the sweet pea blooms,
And the white rose to dormer-windows climbs,
Through woodbine, or the white-starred jessamine :
Dear England ! mother of dear and pleasant homes !

The dancing gnats wail forth their weak thin tune.
In cool and quiet of the glimmering hour,
The robin's song, clear, sweet, and forcible,
Rings from the wheelwright's elms, above the hives,
Where murmur dreamily the drowsy swarms.
The sparrows chirp among the straw-yard ricks.
High in red air the whistling swallows wheel.
The lazy caw of rooks that idly float
Far in the golden west, o'er darkening woods,
Sounds indistinct. Voices from children's play,
The laugh, shrill argument, the winner's shout
Are heard, dying away : lowing of kine
Tells from the meadows milking-time has come.
Along the road the satchelled workmen plod,
With tired deliberate step, their homeward path,
Where the blue smoke from cottage chimneys curls,
Then drifts slow level on the windless air.
The clink of horses' hoofs and grind of wheels
Come nearer, soon again in distance lost.
A solitary crow on lagging wing
Steers for the wood. The dew is on the grass.

Stirring the drowsing elms the breeze revives.
Baaing of sheep, and bark of shepherd's dog
Make known the flock's return. On village green
The village lads use the last light, and crack
Of cricket ball is heard. Donkeys browse round,
Kicking, or swinging ever restless tails ;
While cattle cropping near with snuffing breath,
Twitching their ears, lick up the grass. O'erhead
Buzzing of insects fills the lime-tree's shade
With far off fairy bells. A loitering bee
Swings past, zigzagging on its homeward flight.
The pool gleams white and dead beneath the sky :
As fades the brightness dark and darker stand
Against the western glow the blue-black hills,
Deep, soft, and pure : hedgerows and woods grow black,
Darkening to denser shades. On tower and spire,
And glimmering western windows of the church,
Lingers the pitiful light ; on tombstones near,
Gleams the white marble cross, whose outstretched arms
Seem as they would protect the slumbering dead.
Now o'er the golden corn the red gold moon
Slow rises. Deeper hush each moment falls
To absolute peace, unbroken, not of earth.
Day's expectation dies : nor aught remains
But hooded night's oblivion. Fainter sounds
Die off in cadence of the dying day,
Dreamless and sluggish : then, silence profound.
Once more a stir : expiring eve revives,
Throbbing in but a few uncertain sounds :
Faint squeak and rustle of quick turning bats,
Or chirp of crickets : from the highway dim,

Comes heavily sound of wheels from loaded wain
Rumbling thick muffled through the summer dust ;
Sharp trot of horse's hoofs along the road,
Break through the brooding quiet of the gloom ;
The wind awakes, and sighs amid the boughs
O'erhead. Fragrance of new-mown hay from barn,
Or the near hayrick, breath of cows, and smell
Of fresh-cropped grass, hang on the air, or dust
Damped by the dew. The flickering moth 's abroad,
Coursing the hedgerows, while, between the elms,
Quivers the restless bat. The beetle's drone
Goes past. All timidly peep forth the stars
From the soft gold-flushed sky. Fading, dying,
Earth backward sinks in drowsy depths of night.
The church clock strikes : in faintly muffled tones
The last note quivering dies. Night's outspread wings
Hush the vast silent slumbering world to rest.

XIX

WHEN THE BEECH NUTS DROP.

AS when the sun stoops down the western sky,
Through depths of gold to richer crimson depths,
Till gentle eve fades off to sombre night,
So dies the summer. Gorgeous pageantry,
Gathers in pomp around the year's full close.
The frantic storms born of the equinox,
That flung in air red leaves, ungathered corn,
Fold their gaunt wings and rocky cradled rest.
Dreaming above a silent dreaming world,
The hazy mellow sunshine softens down

The landscape's outlines, hills, or yellowing woods.
The year's procession of the flowers has passed,
But for few lingerers straying from the ranks :
The sunflower's disc breathes odour sickly faint,
Hanging its giant head on wilted stem ;
Daisies of Michaelmas with leaden bloom,
In cottage gardens tell the waning year.
The musk plant suns itself anear the door,
Where on the wall, beside the thrush's cage,
A last rose blushes ; in the flower knot
The sweet-pea's flowers still spread their wings for flight ;
The leaning hollyhocks seem smit with thought.
Heavy autumnal smell of mignonette
And earthy leaves decayed hangs on the air.

How soft, how dreamlike all the landscape round,
With sense of sunny restfulness and peace !
Out of dead stillness rings the sudden bang
From sportsman's gun, quickly repeated, till
The frightened echoes to far distance fly.
Rooks, loudly cawing, mount into the sky.
Again, dead silence falls, the dream dreams on.
The robin's clear sharp note pipes from the hedge.
Rising and falling in his hurried flight,
A water-wagtail lights and jerks his tail.
Small flocks of tuneless larks, flit on the hills,
Nestling with bellies white 'mid the lucerne,
Or pale clear yellow charlock in the fields.
The starlings chatter, sparrows ceaseless chirp.
Each trivial sound seems ghostly, indistinct ;
The crackle of the quitch fire in the fields ;
The muffled rumble of a far-off train,

Or sleepy swinging of the matins bell,
From village tower wrapped in its sunny dream.
Over the hedge floats the sweet breath of cows.
Here withered vines, festoons, there blood red haws
With scarlet hips, soft feathery fluff of seeds,
Wait the rough handling of the winter's storms :
Red dock seeds, bursting thistles, poppy heads,
Crowd forth, wild chamomile, and trailing bines,
With pink-streaked bell of last convolvulus,
Black bryony, or lusty bramble thorns
Starred with white blossoms, blackberries unripe,
Safe in unripeness, wanting power of sun,
That, growing daily feebler, ne'er will come ;
Existences unfinished, soon to drop
Into the limbo of unfinished things.

A robin lights, bright sunblink in his eye ;
His scarlet breast amid the yellowing gear
Conspicuous. The blackbird 'mid the haws
Startled, with riotous chuckle headlong flies ;
While through the misty sunshine overhead,
Flaps by the silent crow on sluggish wing,
With moving shadow spot across the field.

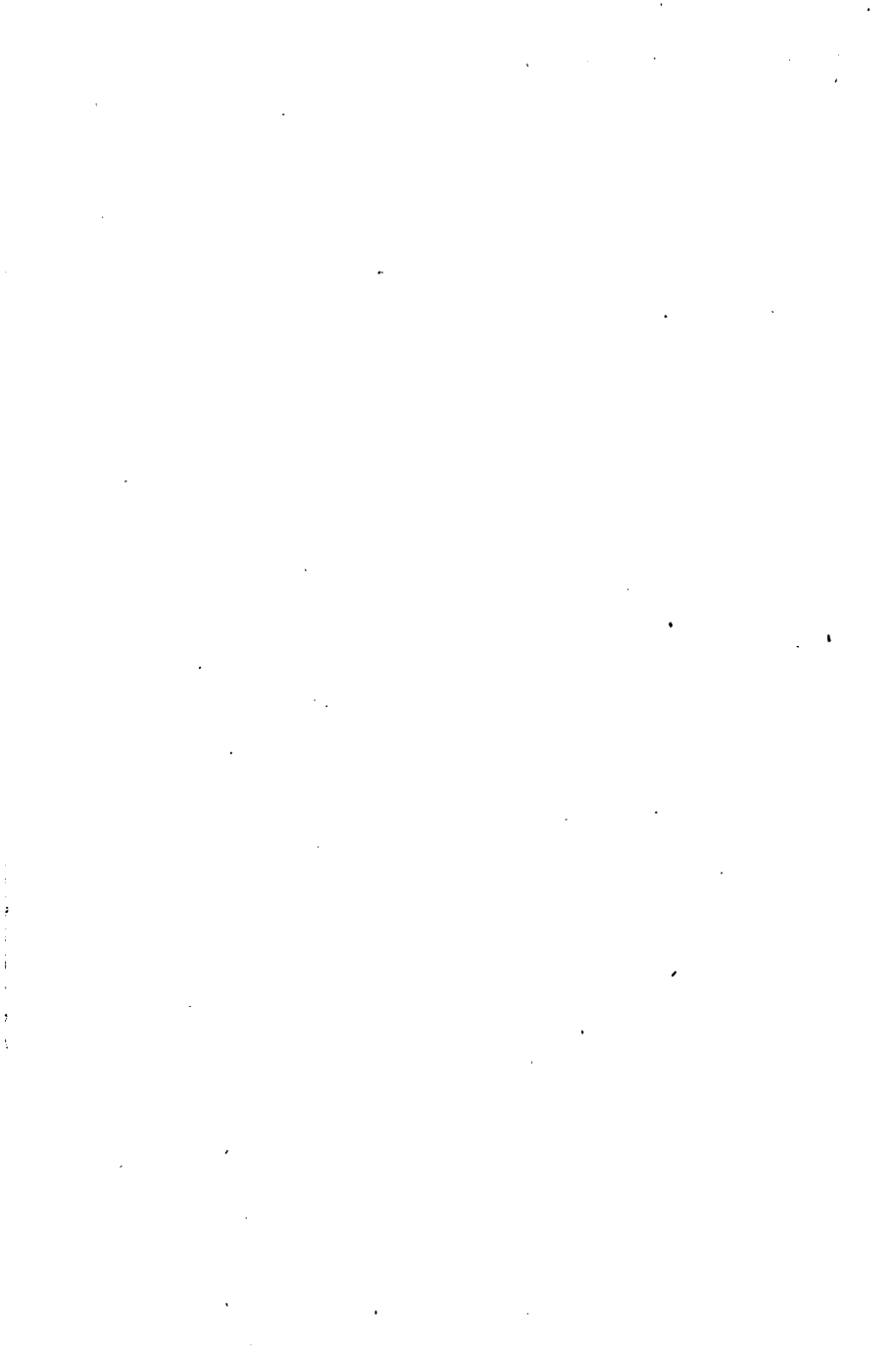
A black retriever trotting at his heels,
The gamekeeper plods down the tangled lane ;
Gaitered in leather he, the morning sun
Glistening along his double-barrelled gun :
The echo of his footsteps dies away.
Deep stillness falls again upon the fields
Where months ago the sunburnt mowers toiled,
Or reapers stood amid the breast-high corn,
Bare stubble now, festooned with gossamer,

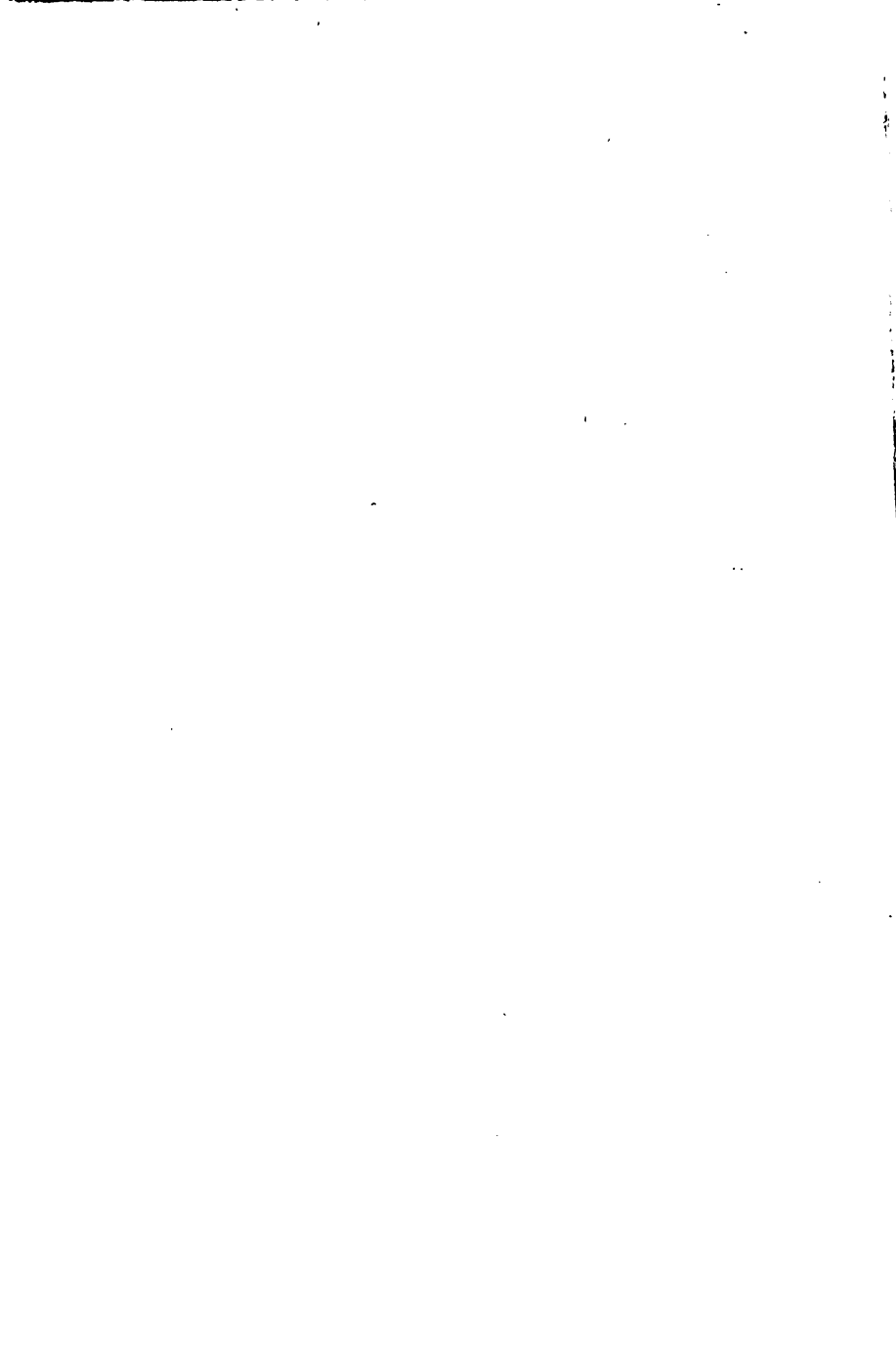
Where from the smouldering field fires drifts the smoke.
From hedge to hedge flit whirring flocks of birds,
Now scattering o'er the empty stubble fields,
Now in dense clouds upflying as the sound
Again of sportsman's gun rings through the air.
In the thinned hawthorn hedge 'midst yellowing leaves,
Or scarlet, the once guarded nest is seen,
Where, in the fresh white world of blossoming may,
The goldfinch chirruped o'er her fledgeling brood.
Lured by the lingering warmth of th' autumn sun
The bees still ply, though sluggishly, their task,
Filching the few last lurking honey drops.
The dew-drop trembles on the red-stemmed brier ;
The gossamer spider hangs his shining threads,
And decks the breeze with bright prismatic hues.
Now drops the wind ; the aimless thistle-down
Poised in 'mid air falls softly to the ground :
The tittering leaves grow mute. O'erhead, the dome
Of the broad orange-spotted beech-tree's shade
Has its own doings : slowly red brown leaves
Drift from the parent twigs, littering the ground ;
With tiny click the beech-nuts pattering drop.
Nature's capricious fingers here and there
Have touched the elms with fading yellow spots.
A mounded chesnut-tree, with outward leaves
Still green, but yellowing inwards to the stem,
Seems like a cupola filled with golden light,
Whose transient glory fades each passing day.

So draws the year to its majestic close,
So ebbs the mighty tide of nature's life,
Grandly serene, with sombre skies, brief days.

Nature now chants sublime recessional,
In richest harmony of glorious tones,
From cadence to sublimer cadence moved.
Why should the individual life complain,
When all around obeys mutation's law?
Or why despair lest after death's great ebb
The tide of larger life should not reflow?
Here in the world's death-chamber darkened round,
Where twinkles in the gloom the Great Perhaps,
The mind sore daunted apprehensive shrinks
Perplexed with menace to the single life.
Yet prescient of a nobler destiny,
Larger probations, nobler fruit, man learns
The euthanasia of the fruitful life;
Deeming maturity transitional,
Perchance brief vantage to an ampler range.
Gathering her essences and life in seed,
Nature's far eyes look beyond wintry storm,
Look beyond death, since death is not her end.

Here through rich windows dight of ceaseless change,
Each change confirming man's most cherished hope,
Each gleam of loveliness a ray of love;
Passing through nature's solemn cloistral paths,
He learns life's worthiest ends,— a pressing on
To growth of reverence, tolerance, larger love,
Sees life's true gain, life's duties truly done,
Manful endeavour sprung of bold resolve,
The mount, the falling, but again to rise:
The rise, the failing, though again to fall.
Death out of life; life's triumph over death.





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